GHOSTS of the TALL AND UNCUT

by

GORDON JESSE WALKER

1495

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of the

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I did all my growing up and got my education here in the Rogue River Valley in Southern Oregon. Most of my learning process was gained by the school of hard knocks, trial and error. But common sense prevailed and allowed God to guide me in the right direction.

After a lot of years working on farms, orchards and logging, I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service, Rogue River National Forest.

In March of 1953, I started out as a combination mule skinner (packer) and smoke chaser. I was to supply fire lookouts and several crews in the high country such as trail maintenance and construction, fire crews, etc. Many times I would be in the saddle seven days a week and all hours of the day and night. Fires don't wait on anyone. Also, during a lightning bust or any fire, I was supposed to make the initial attack in my area of responsibility, day or night. But I spent 80% of my time in the saddle.

Me, my wife, and five children, lived at a remote place called Lodge Pole, and I led my pack string and chased smoke from there for six hot summers. After that, a couple other assignments put me back in the saddle again for ten more years. I felt indeed fortunate to have had such a job that put me high in the tall and uncut timber where I felt at home.

THANKS

I want to thank my daughter, Tricia Kraemer, for typing, organizing, assembling pictures and chapters,and putting everything into book form. Also for all the good advice on various other little details I would have missed.

My son, Don, and daughters, Janna and Leslie, gave me encouraging words and listened as I told some of the stories I wrote down. My wife, Bea, was a great help in spelling difficult words.

I thank my family for a helping hand.

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GHOSTS OF THE TALL AND UNCUT
PROLOGUE

During the years I worked as a mule skinner (packer), many long evenings were spent sitting within the warmth of a campfire. It was always a great joy to listen as some of the old-timers on the trail crew told stories about weird and unusual happenings during their wilderness encampments. A few of those men had a knack at causing their stories to be quite vivid. There were times when I would crawl down into my bedroll and try to sleep with one eye open. I would always keep my pistol close by where I could lay a hand on it quickly.

Down through the years I found out first hand that a good many of the stories I listened to were true. Dozens of times I have ridden across country and on many a trail, leading a pack string over the forest floor. I worked hard and did the momentous packing job alone. It was much easier that way, because there was one less man to keep track of.

Always, my main concerns were my animals. The pack mules and horses, my saddle horse and dog were my constant companions. I've been asked if I ever got lonely. Of course not. They were the best company a man could ever have.

A good packer learns to understand the movements and actions of each animal, dog and all. Every mule has their own personality traits, but when something unusual occurs along the trail, they all react about the same. Of course there are exceptions.

There were times when I have been spooked or felt chills travel up my back and down my arms for no apparent reason. Even during daylight hours, strange things have happened, and nerves get a raw edge.

A few of those times were my own imagination. But, strong feelings were so intense, adrenalin would start to flow into my veins. Those were the

times that I wished that all my mother's kids were at home. But finally I would come to my senses and realize my livestock and dog were not upset in the least. It would take me a little while to get settled down and return to reality again. I would feel a little silly.

And then again it was the other way around. When my animals suddenly became spooky it usually got worse. They would remain that way until we got completely away from the area. And even after that, the uneasiness stayed with them, sometimes for several days.

It would cause a gentle mule to become more difficult to catch and they would be very alert. One jenny mule, called Stella, jumped clear over the hitching rail when a cowboy started to nail shoes on her feet two days later, after a spooky experience.

When a man (or woman) rides the forest trails after dark, especially during a full moon, there is a strange phenomenon that takes place. There are certain optical illusions that cause things to start moving around as you fix your gaze on an object. Barkless snags, bushes, or a large boulder will seem to move around. The longer you stare at it the worse it gets. Now that is real spooky, even for a man with many years of riding and camping in the wilderness.

Many a time I have heard the mournful howl of a timber wolf, coyotes yapping and night birds chasing a bug or calling to one another across canyons. I have listened to a good many noises that were caused by something or just happened.

But what causes me to be more jumpy than anything is when I start feeling creepy and scared for no visible reason. There are so many things going on out there in the tall and uncut that people do not realize.

I have been scared half out of my wits and hurt by something I couldn't see. And I've seen my saddle horse and pack string go half crazy and stay

that way. It would take awhile for them to recover from their fright.

My little black dog, called Snoopy, put ten different black bear up trees during his 15 year lifetime, but I've seen him so scared he was completely out of control and would hide wherever there was a hole big enough. I too could feel the deep depressive feeling that scared him so bad.

I have ridden across and along three Great Divides. They are the Umpqua, Cascade, and Siskiyou. The Cascades are where those strange feelings and happenings took place. But it never kept me from riding that part of the range.

The following stories are all true. I hope that some of those who read GHOSTS OF THE TALL AND UNCUT will venture forth and see for yourself. Be careful and be prepared. You might be in for a big surprise.

Snoopy Dog, treed ten black bear during his 15 year life

CHAPTER ONE
PIONEER MULE SKINNER

When my ancestors came to Southern Oregon, Rogue River Valley (1862), the country was very much unsettled. The Homestead Act allowed each family to mark out and settle down on parcels of land up to 160 acres.

They arrived here in covered wagons from Iowa. Their first acreage was on Rogue River, southwest of what they call Flounce Rock. Several families set up housekeeping on over 400 acres of tillable and forested land. They raised cattle and did a lot of farming. Their homes and other farm buildings were constructed using Douglas Fir logs.

Material was readily available to build corrals and fences with. It was truly a simple way of life but at times, very intense. Winters were bad back then, and hot summers were prevalent. But the old-timers were tough people. The only way anyone ever survived was by using good old common sense, and neighbors. Everybody helped one another.

The only transportation back then was by using horses. They were used to pull wagons, buggies, and served as pack animals.

During the winter months, pack horses were the only way to get supplies into the remote areas. Generally a settler would saddle a good riding horse and rig up a couple pack animals. He would leave his home prepared to be away for at least three days. One day to the settlement, one day to do his buying and catch up on current events, and one day to get back home.

In those days no one ever got in a hurry. But the working hours were long and hard for everyone. A farmer or cattleman lived a tough, hard life. No one ever heard anyone griping about such a wonderful way to live.

Ever so often everyone in the community would let all holds go and spend some time together. The

4th of July was a favorite. At such occasions there was no drinking of booze whatsoever. The celebrations would start out in mid-morning and last until the wee hours of the next day.

Men and women alike would spend much time bragging and exchanging ideas about everything from planting corn to having and raising children. It was times like these where the young men and women would meet each other for the first time. The result, of course, was the beginning of a new family about to get underway, living the wonderful life of high mountain farmers or cattlemen.

As time marched on mules and donkeys were introduced to the community. Homesteads began to pop up all over the country as more people filtered in. Small settlements were established by selecting a central location for a post office. Southern Oregon was really coming to life.

In the very early 1900's, National Forests were starting to take shape. Huge parcels of land were set aside to be controlled by the government for the benefit of the people. There were five different resources to consider. These were wood, water, forage, recreation, and wildlife. All these were to be protected by the United States Forest Service.

The worst spoiler of all five valuable resources is, of course, fire. Hence, the numerous lookout towers scattered throughout the land to spot the forest killers. Right about then was when mules came into their own. One reason was because they were more sure-footed than horses. The sturdy animals were capable of carrying heavy loads to steep and hard-to-get-to places.

Lookout houses were constructed on top of the high-mountain peaks so the observer could detect a forest fire almost the moment it started. Each structure was around 14 foot square. The lumber was cut, ready to assemble on arrival. The walls all the way around were glass windows. In the center of the house was an Osburn Firefinder. It

was set up over a map that was adjusted to magnetic north. An aluminum ring about 28 inches across was mounted on a track around the map. A frame equipped with cross hairs was mounted on one side of the ring and a peep site on the other. If a fire came to life the detector could adjust the ring and line the cross hairs up through the peep site and pinpoint the fire.

Anyhow, everything it took to construct one of these lookout houses was cargoed in by pack mules. At one time there was a tower on top of Mt. Pitt (Mount McLaughlin). Right here in Southern Oregon there were fire lookout houses and towers set up all over the country by the dozens. This included not only USFS structures but the State of Oregon put lookouts on high peaks throughout private land ownership. I saw what was left of a tower built in fairly flat country but the observer could cover a great amount of timbered land no one else could look into.

In 1953, the Rogue River National Forest still used 14 fire lookout stations. And the state manned several of their own besides that. During the early 1930's the C.C.C. men tied most of the fire lookouts to the outside world with grounded telephone lines. This gave a constant flow of communications day and night to speed up the process of fire suppression.

Ever after the first lookout was built there was a constant maintenance job on hand. Access trails were improved. Men and supplies had to be taken into and out of the remote places. Telephone line maintenance was an on-going problem.

Down through the years, hundreds of pack trips were made, using both mules and horses. There was a head packer and an assistant for maybe every 20 head of pack stock. Of course a packer always rode a horse to lead or drive with.

Houses, barns, and corrals were built in remote places accessible only by trails. Many of these places a packer could bring in his family and live

there all summer long. Fact of the matter is, in 1953, when I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service, I saw several of the old guard station sites my first year.

Mosquito Guard Station, 12 miles north of Butte Falls, had a pack string of 20 head. The corrals were still there and pasture fence still up.

Willow Prairie, northwest of Fish Lake, ran 20 head. The log cabin is still there, and old wire and bent-over fence posts mark the boundary of the pasture.

King Spruce was a dandy spot. It took all day to ride in and set things up. There were 10 or 15 head of mules there.

Bessie Shelter, about 10 miles remote, was 3 miles south of Bessie Rock. A packer was set up there all summer long.

There were several more modern guard stations throughout the country. The one I lived at was called Lodge Pole, 16 miles northeast of Butte Falls. Eight miles to the north of me was another beautiful place called Imnaha.

The houses were equipped with hot and cold running water. We cooked our food on a wood burning stove and heated the house with a cast iron heater. My job was a combination smoke chaser and mule skinner (packer). When a fire was kindled, either by lightning or somebody, I was supposed to make the initial attack any place in my part of the country. My area of responsibility was over 150 thousand acres. But my main duties were to carry supplies and equipment to remote areas on the Cascade Divide.

The trips included taking supplies to three lookouts which were Bessie Rock, Devil's Peak, and Blue Rock. They needed supplies once a week, sometimes every two weeks. There was a seven man trail construction crew that was set up at Heather Ponds on the west slope of Seven Lakes Basin. I supplied those men every week with food and trail camp equipment. Also, during the week, there would

be a couple trips hauling in dynamite and electric blasting caps, two mule loads each time; caused a packer to be just a little jumpy, especially during hunting season.

There was a three man trail maintenance crew who was busy most of the summer. Their camp had to be moved quite often. I also hauled equipment and supplies for two different timber inventory, 3 man crews, who were working in different parts of the country. Also, a recreation crew was kept busy throughout the summer months in Seven Lakes Basin and Blue Canyon.

On top of all that, there was always the never-ending task of packing equipment to forest fires. I packed more things out of fires than to a going fire. I always worked by myself, on purpose. Most any helper only got in my way and caused a lot of trouble.

I only had to holler for help during one big fire bust. In the fall of 1955, Labor Day Weekend, dry lightning caused 21 fires on the Butte Falls District alone. The biggest one was cornered at 270 acres. During that long, hard week I called in four more packers complete with pack strings. It was seven days before I finally returned to Lodge Pole.

You can imagine all the hundreds of pack trips that were made before I fell heir to the job at Lodge Pole in 1953. If the six years I spent there as a packer is an example of all those other mule skinners, it tells me that there were many rough, overnight drags that were not recorded; runaways, wrecks of unbelievable proportions, and lots of stories to tell.

I was in the saddle seven days a week at all hours of the day and night for at least two and a half months a year, from 1953 to 1958. It was a rough, mean, bone-jarring life, but I loved every minute of it.

Every full time packer had to spend all his free time with his pack string. When he spent the

night out there in the tall and uncut, he made camp near his stock. He knew the personalities of every single animal including his dog. They all depended on one another.

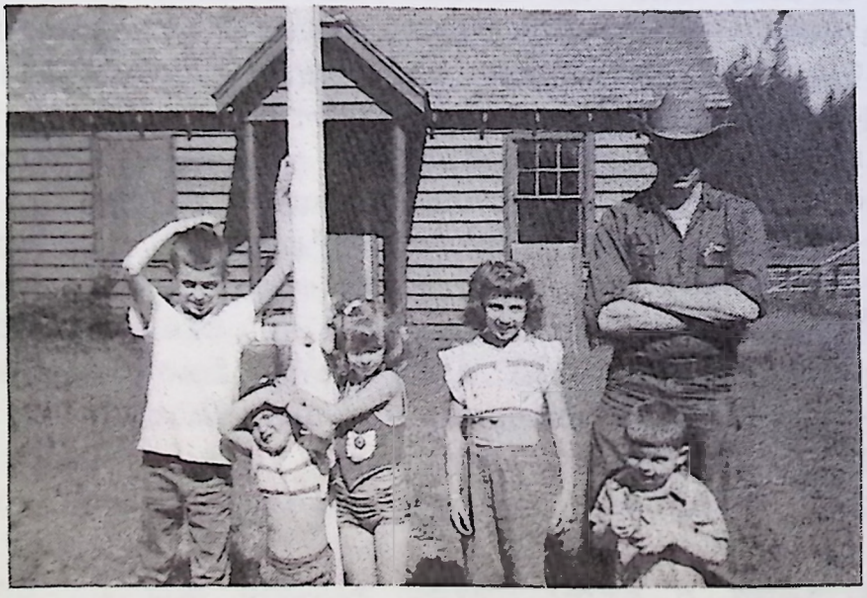
Many a time a mule will start acting up or will become spooky for no apparent reason. If there are several pack and saddle stock around, the feeling hits all of them at the same time. Then the packer starts to feel spooky, too.

A few times I would get a weird feeling that is very hard to explain. It would affect me first, and in moments my mules would start getting spooky, along with my horse and dog. There are times like that which cause me to be wide awake and alert. Most of these feelings of mystery happened to me back on the Cascade Divide between Crater Lake National Park and Highway 140, and the area east and west was maybe twenty miles across.

I have sat around a campfire many a time, listening to unusual stories about the unexplainable. I'm sure that most of them were true, but no doubt some real storytellers might stretch the truth a little. But, nonetheless, every man in the group got goose bumps and cold chills as a story unfolded. All the yarns I will relate to you about my mule skinning life are true. And I'm thankful I'm here to tell about them.

The following chapters of the GHOSTS OF THE TALL AND UNCUT will include a few of the spooky, bone-chilling, hair-raising incidents that affected man and beast alike.

Lodge Pole house, Old Budd horse and Dillon mule



Lodge Pole house in early spring, five young Walkers: L to R, Don, Leslie, Janna, Tricia, Tracy, and Gordon Jesse Walker

CHAPTER TWO
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

The years I lived at Lodge Pole Guard Station with my family hold many pleasant and exciting memories. Our three daughters and two sons learned all about wilderness living. Such a wonderful way to teach them about wildlife and the habitats of all species.

I was able to teach them different tree names and certain bushes and shrubs that made up the ground cover. During the summer evenings we would stand or sit outside in the yard and listen to night noises. Most of the sounds could be identified but there were always a few that still remain a mystery. Times like that could become quite intense if we let our imaginations get serious. No doubt sheer panic would take over and everyone would dash for the safety of a well-lighted house.

At that time every fire lookout and guard station was tied together by telephone lines. Communication to all these out-lying, remote areas originated at Forest Headquarters, or we could talk to one another. When the phone rang the bells on every telephone on the District would start clanging away. It was ok to eavesdrop. After all, it could be some lookout turning in a fire.

One evening, around 10:00 P.M., our phone started clanging away. I had just gone to bed. In a few seconds I was standing at the telephone table listening in. When the phone rang at that time of day, surely something big was going on or about to happen. Believe me, this was something big.

The man on Stella Mountain Lookout, north of Union Creek Ranger Station, was quite excited. He had spotted an object that appeared to be a huge ball of fire. It was a dark, warm, summer night. There wasn't even a sliver of a moon, and the stars

didn't seem to light the sky like we had seen before.

He had called headquarters and roused his boss out of bed. The conversation between the two men was a combination of shouting and whispering. The fire ball was spotted bouncing along in an easterly direction on the Umpqua Divide. He said it was bright yellow and orange with a blue fringe around the outside. It was following the contour of the high mountain ridge. Then there were times it seemed to be getting closer to Stella Mountain or was slowly increasing in size, he couldn't tell which. It would fluctuate and become big, then small, but still moving around. The man on Stella Mountain Lookout almost departed, because it looked forever more like it was heading right toward him. The UFO might try to carry him away if it was a flying saucer.

Meanwhile his boss was headed that way. I knew the man would turn on his mobile unit the moment he left the station. My radio was sitting near the telephone, and I flipped the switch and ran up the antenna. By now he was up the road north of Brown's cabin.

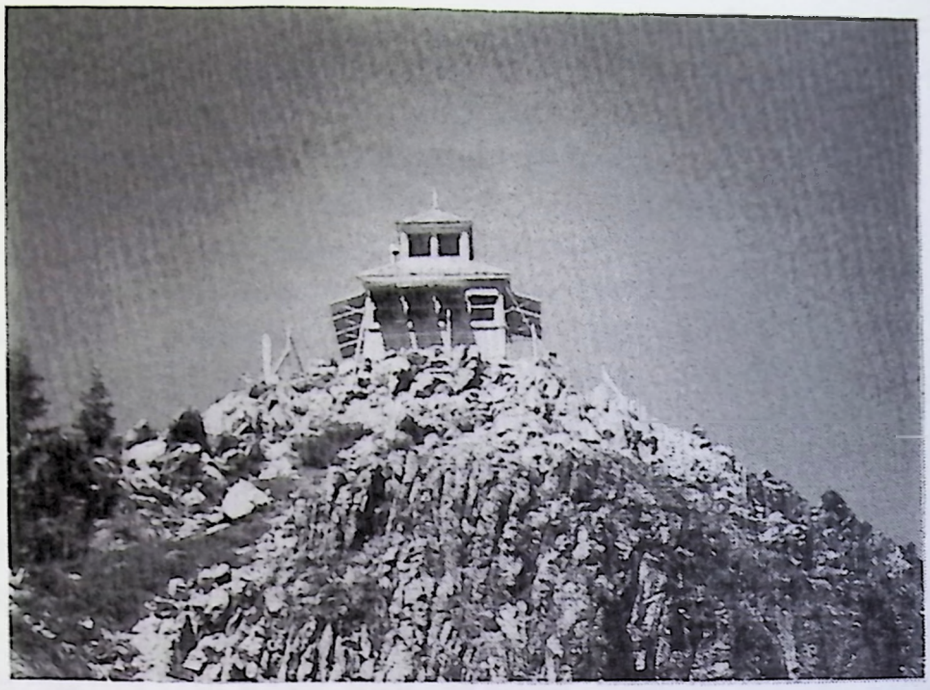
One man wouldn't shut up long enough for the other to answer. Sounded like a couple of magpies. There was most definitely something strange taking place. When the boss reached the saddle he parked at the junction of the Flat Creek and Lookout roads. From there he had a clear view of part of the Umpqua Divide. Sure enough, there it was. He watched as it slowly descended down along the south slope toward Flat Creek and veered off toward Rogue River, a couple miles away. Said the very bright fire ball slowly disappeared behind tall timber and hit the ground maybe a half mile south of Flat Creek. The moment it struck, there was a muffled explosion followed by a light-colored smoke that drifted above the tree tops silhouetted against the sky.

After that the boss drove on up to the lookout to compare notes with the excited fire detector. It was then that my communication quit, and we had to wait until the next day to hear what happened.

As the two men talked and tried to figure out what the object was, they found that each man saw it a little differently. The boss swore up and down he could see lights blinking, and it made a whirring sound just before it landed. The lookout man said when it hit the ground he felt a slight vibration. Their versions of the strange phenomenon varied considerable, but the fact remains, it was real.

When the UFO hit the ground the fire finder was zeroed in on the spot. From then on the site could be checked on, especially on hot afternoons when a sleeper fire could ignite and take off. Later that week I heard that the boss had sent two men out to try and locate the crash site. There was nothing to show any evidence where the object struck, and no fire ever materialized.

For several nights following, every fire lookout in the country was a little jumpy, but the whole thing slowly wore off, especially after a few lightning storms occupied most of our time. But one thing for sure, something is going on out there in the wilderness all the time, and once in awhile a human being gets a good look or weird feeling about something unexplainable. I feel fortunate to be a part of the wonderful tall and uncut wild country.



Hershberger Lookout Umpqua Divide

Devil's Peak

CHAPTER THREE
GOOSE BUMPS AT TITANIC FLAT

In 1955, I became a permanent, full-time employee on the Butte Falls District, Rogue River National Forest. I still worked as a mule skinner (packer) and smoke chaser at Lodge Pole during the summer months. From the first part of November until May the following year there was quite a variety of jobs that needed to be done.

There was a continuous effort to lay out timber sales. After a sale boundary was set up on a map it was quite a task sometimes to get it established on the ground. Lots of steep, rough, brushy country to travel in. One of these timber sales I got involved with from start to finish was along the extreme west edge of the old Cat Hill burn.

Much of the area was dotted with water springs that gushed from flat areas and hill sides. Each spring formed its own mountain stream, and they were tributaries of Big Butte Creek. Every stream acquired its own name, such as Misfit Spring, Titanic Creek, Big Ben, Twincheria, Jackass, Mule Creek, etc.

The many high mountain streams were easy to plot their path on maps and locate the channels cut through ways of least resistance in ravines, shallow canyons, and low places. I have seen legal-sized mountain trout in every one of these streams, no matter how small. How the critters got there, I'll never know.

Within the timber sale area we laid out were two of these creeks. Titanic Creek and Misfit paralleled each other about half a mile apart. My partner, Chuck, and I had to walk across country through tall timber to reach the sale boundary. There were two reasons this area was chosen. One was to salvage numerous dying, old growth timber that wasn't burned during the big Cat Hill Fire. The other reason to create the sale was to continue

building to the District Transportation system. An appraisal was made after the timber was cruised and marked out. It would reflect road costs, timber stand improvement, and other maintenance problems after the sale was logged.

Chuck and I spent one day sizing up our newly laid out job. We walked the perimeter and brightened up blank places with new boundary signs. Wild animals loved to rip the bright blue cardboard goodies off and chew them to bits.

Finally we hit the brush and got down to business. We would be working alone but would stay on a certain compass course. That way it would be easy to find our way back to the main road. This was extremely wild country. Chuck carried a pistol. He and I figured out a plan of action before leaving the office. Using an aerial photo, the islands of timber showed up good. We each carried copies to compare shape and size of each site when we got there. We would double up on the larger islands.

In those days no one on the district was a clock watcher. If we got there an hour or so early and left just before dark, that was our business. Our first day on the new timber sale, he and I had to sit in the pickup and drink coffee and spin yarns until it was light enough to see where we were going.

Our canvas pack sacks contained several quart cans of yellow paint, our lunches, and first aid kits. I added waterproof matches and a bundle of pitch so as to be able to start a fire where we ate our lunches.

It had rained during the night, and every leaf on all the brush seemed to hold a half cup of water. We wore water repellant rain clothes and aluminum hard hats. I wore ankle tight rubber boots with 16 inch tops.

When we reached the boundary of the sale on the south side, I chose to hold close to the west side. Chuck went along the tagged line, east for maybe a

hundred yards. Our watches were set so they would both read the same. It was ten minutes after 7 a.m.

I waited for maybe five minutes before taking off through the unknown. I took a compass shot almost due north, toward a tall spiked-top Doug Fir that was at least a quarter mile away. It was in the midst of about twenty some odd other trees, one of the islands of timber mentioned before. It was just beyond a wide swampy area.

My marking strip was about 100 yards wide. We marked every tree on both sides with a large "C". Each one would show above the brush. Also we made sure all the yellow marks faced our direction of travel, and from where we came from. We cruised every fifth tree and recorded tree height, diameter--breast high, and other pertinent information.

I have seen a few foresters head out through a patch of timber, marking trees right and left, many times not paying any attention to a compass. When they finally realized their mistake they would be lost as lost could get, and would have to spend most of the day finding their way out. Finally they would realize that the old standby, non-professionals really did know what they were talking about.

For the next hour I managed to mark fifteen or twenty big trees, but was still a long way from my compass shot tree. All the slick leaf brush was still low to the ground caused by heavy snow. The taller ones had limbs clear to the ground.

I slipped and fell flat, got slapped in the face, and spray painted myself once when the trigger of my paint gun hung up on a limb as my body fell down through about six foot of brush. A time or two I could hear Chuck getting a little loud as he worked his way through the thick jungle. It would be interesting to hear his stories when we headed for home.

Soon I came to a wide draw where I could see water moving along in a south-westerly direction. It was a series of what appeared to be shallow streams that covered ground as far as I could see through the brush. I put my paint gun in the pack sack so as to use both hands and try to paw my way across to an island of timber. Twice I slipped on the slick underbrush and blame near fell into the water. It took about twenty minutes to work my way across to higher ground.

As I rested some and got my paint gun ready, I could see the huge Doug Fir tree I had my eye on all the time. It was at least seven feet in diameter--breast high. Right about then a real creepy feeling crept over me. Cold chills ran up the outsides of my arms and down my back. I felt like taking flight. It was such an uneasy feeling that cannot be explained. But I had to do something.

First I listened to see if Chuck was somewhere close by. He carried a gun. The man wasn't anywhere in sight. Could be something had already latched onto him, who knows. Slowly, with great caution, I edged along a wide path-like clearing. My paint gun was painted like it was a pistol. I knew for sure if something popped out from behind that big tree, he, or it, would be seeing a lot of yellow paint.

On all old growth timber the bark is sort of scaly. The weathered loose pieces will come off if touched, or by some other means. On this tree the outside bark was gone. The tree trunk was still covered with thick bark, but it was almost worn smooth all the way around. About 40 feet up the trunk was a dense growth of mistletoe that grew out at least eight feet or more all the way around. It was quite evident that some heavy animal lived in this tree. Boy did I feel spooky. Not only that, I felt depressed and withdrawn. I had felt like this before out here in the wilderness but not quite so intense. I couldn't seem to be able to

look in enough directions at once. I never put a mark on anything.

Soon I heard a noise that scared me even worse, but it turned out to be Chuck. He was working his way through the tangle and fell down and landed on his sack lunch. Of course it was in his pack sack along with some cans of paint. He was still a couple hundred feet away.

I walked away from the big tree to an opening up ahead. At one edge was a long narrow hole filled with moving muddy water. My first thought was that it was a bear waller. An animal had left it just before I got there. The weird feeling I had was so intense I could hardly stand it. I went looking for Chuck.

At the edge of the timber I walked toward him aways and waited. When he walked toward me, Chuck was jabbering like a magpie, quite exasperated about past events, working his way through this mess. I could see that nothing bothered him in the least, except his smashed lunch, a red left ear, and a torn pants leg. We talked for a moment, and I asked him to check his gun. He got a little suspicious, but shrugged it off. Then I told him to head into the timber and don't look back. Again, he hesitated a moment, laughed, and headed out. I stood and watched. He was looking toward the ground.

Suddenly he stopped and came staggering backwards. He said, "Gee-man-nee, what's going on?" He turned a little pale and started rubbing his arms. Chuck had just experienced the same feeling I did, cold chills and all.

He pulled his gun and was ready to thumb the hammer back. We walked side by side to the big tree and on to the water hole. There were no visible tracks anywhere, except we noticed that bark was worn off several other trees in the stand, some of which we could see almost to their tops.

While Chuck stood guard with his gun I marked and cruised the timber. We departed as fast as we

could and never returned to that site. In fact we arrived back at the main road over an hour early. We hadn't even eaten our lunches yet. We sat in silence for awhile, trying to sort out feelings. Both of us had been in places where bear, deer, elk, mountain lions, and other wild animals lived in abundance. But neither of us ever experienced such a bad feeling. We had never heard of Big Foot or flying saucers yet. Guess we were lucky.

As we talked it over there was something I had forgotten about. There was a strange smell throughout the whole island of timber. Something I've never experienced before or since. Chuck agreed.

Several times when I was a young teenager roaming around in hills and mountainous country, I had walked into places that literally repelled me. Something kept me from continuing on. I never questioned that feeling nor did I ever return to those places.

Like I said, all these happenings occurred in or adjacent to the Cascade Divide in Southern Oregon. Many other people have had similar experiences, but few ever talk about them. It's too bad, because I'm sure that some exciting, true stories could be written down.

Black Bear,

Cascade Divide

CHAPTER FOUR
ALERT AND READY - THE McKIE MYSTERY

A packer's work day is always filled with thrills and great anticipation. The mule skinner's life I lead causes me to live on the edge of excitement each and every moment. Those days I'm not in the saddle leading my mules up some trail or across country to an isolated camp, I'm reliving or thinking out some of the spooky experiences that have happened to me. The times I have ridden along the Cascade, Siskiyou, or Umpqua Divides, certain things have happened that are worth passing on to the readers of this story. Out there in the wilderness lurks many a mysterious feeling such as great anticipation, loneliness, alertness, and fear. Fear is generated by the unknown which is generally brought on by some noise you can't identify. Or you get the feeling that someone or some thing is watching you or following along just out of sight, and now and then, makes a shuffling sound or a dry limb snaps under foot.

The howl of a coyote, the owl that follows along as you ride, and even a porcupine walking through the brush and shrubs makes an unusual noise that causes goose bumps to rise up on your back and down your arms.

All these feelings have happened to me on the trails of the wilderness, but the one feeling that came to me on a six mile trip late in July one year, is the most weird I ever had in 26 years as a packer. It is a feeling that has come back to me time after time, as I'm trying to figure out what the mystery really was, and why my stock reacted the way they did.

On the 30th of July in 1979, a trip was planned into the Sky Lakes country at a place called McKie. A crew of nine people had spent a week at the place to rebuild a shelter. They fell trees to cut sills from, and various braces that needed to be replaced

on a shelter there. I had cargoed shakes to the site by pack mule so old ones could be replaced on the structure. The three-sided building is about 14 feet long and 10 feet wide. One side is open so a fireplace can be used during a storm. It was built in the early 1930's, by the C.C.C. people, and was in bad need of repair.

The first night I ever spent at the McKie Shelter was the summer of 1953. Since then, the place has been a welcome sight as I rode toward it on a stormy day or night a good many times. The 30th of July was my 56th birthday. The sky was cloudless and almost dark blue, looking at it through the tree tops. My mules appeared to be a little restless, standing tied to the fifth wheel trailer as their pack saddles were cinched up. My saddle horse moved around more than usual when the big riding saddle was tossed up on his back. It was 15 minutes after 8:00 a.m. when I climbed into the saddle and headed toward the Cascade Divide, on the Tom and Jerry Trail.

About twenty minutes before departure, there was a noise out in the timber to the northeast about 100 yards away. The mules were very alert and never took their eyes from that direction. To me, it was nothing unusual. It was most likely a deer that jumped up and bounded off, or an elk that was frightened by our presence. Nevertheless, it was something that drew the stock's attention to the point that made them nervous and jittery.

About one-half mile up the trail, we crossed Bessie Creek. My big horse, Robert, didn't want to cross because of a muddy spot on the far side. He finally jumped the mirey place, and we proceeded on up the trail.

Mountain Hemlock and Shasta Fir trees grow thick along the way. Some clumps of trees are so dense, it looks impossible for even a deer to pass through. Huckleberry brush makes up almost the entire species of ground cover beneath the trees, with a few clumps of other kinds of greenery

scattered here and there. The country is perfect for deer and elk habitat. The trail was littered with their tracks.

About a hundred feet beyond the creek, the mules became very nervous. My saddle horse was jumpy. A few moments before I noticed the unusual actions of the animals, I became alert. Something strange was in the wind. An unknown situation was at hand. My horse and mules sensed it the same as I did. Goosebumps flashed up my back and down my arms. I couldn't look enough directions fast enough in hopes of catching a glimpse of some movement or anything that would be a clue as to what was causing this spooky feeling.

We moved right along, up the trail toward the Cascade Divide. Being so unusually alert, I saw things along the way that never caught my attention before in 26 years of being in and out of this country on horseback. Through the many openings between the trees, huge boulders of rock outcroppings could be seen, but the rider had to look at just the right instant to see them. I saw stringer meadows and small canyons. There were open stretches of timber you could see through, for maybe a quarter of a mile. My alert feeling was intense and constant, and I couldn't seem to collect a train of thought, except to try to figure out what was maybe about to happen.

When a packer or cowboy rides, he very rarely has a worry in the world. I've never ever been in a bad worried state of mind while riding. It's one of my ways of relaxing, and a time to collect my feelings and think thoughts I like to think.

If a bear ran across the trail, or if there were fresh tracks made by one of the black beasts, my mules would go to pieces and generally lose a load or two. They would become quite nervous and wouldn't settle down for a mile or so. I, too, would be very alert, looking for the bear and trying to spot more tracks. But alertness would

soon fade away into a relaxed attitude again, and all would be well until an elk or deer moved.

Stinging yellowjackets can also cause quite a fracas and causes adrenalin to flow, and you become extremely alert. But, after the parts and pieces are rounded up and repacked on the runaway mules again, everything slowly goes back to normal.

But this day was different. The strange feeling was more intense than anything we ever felt as hundreds of miles have passed beneath me and my horse's feet down through the years. We passed over the Divide and headed for McKie, about another three miles away. The mules stayed close behind, but kept on coming. A couple of times, my horse seemed reluctant to continue his steady pace.

From the summit to McKie, the trail works its way downhill, and a series of switchbacks come down to one flat plateau after another. The last plateau is maybe 200 yards across and nearly level. As we crossed that one, I saw one of those lush stringer meadows mentioned before. We even went out to it and followed it from one end to the other, then went back to the trail. We dropped off the plateau, down the switchbacks, toward McKie Flat. The moment we started down, things got worse. The air felt as though it was full of electricity. It was spooky. Big Red tried to get out ahead at first, then held back to his place at the tail of the pack string. My horse under me was very nervous, but we kept moving.

McKie Shelter looked good after the Y.C.C. people put new timbers under it and new shakes on the outside. Everything looked normal. The sky was still cloudless, and there wasn't a breath of air, nor did I see any movement of wildlife. Most always there were birds of some kind fluttering around in the tree tops.

I tied the mules up about forty feet apart with the horse tied over to one side. It was around 10:15 a.m., so just to rest up some, I took my saddle bags from the back of the saddle, tossed

them over my shoulder and walked over to the shelter. I sat down and dug around for something to eat. My nerves were tighter than drum strings, and hunger just didn't exist. My mules were moving around and seemed to both be looking toward the same direction. My saddle horse kept an eye peeled in that direction, too. After putting down a banana and half a cup of coffee, I couldn't stand it any more, so I proceeded to drag stuff from the shelter that was supposed to be packed out to civilization.

There was about 100 pounds of garbage to go. It included a bunch of junk that elk hunters had left behind the year before. The Y.C.C. people had rolled it up in two bundles of black plastic. It was easy to tie twine around the bundles to hold it together.

Big Red was the first to load, one box on his left side, and an insulated chest-type cooler tied to a lumber carrier on the right. A Coleman gas stove and a couple of other loose articles were placed on top of the box. As a top pack, I pushed up one of the plastic bundles which weighed about 60 pounds. It fit just right. The pack cover was draped over the top and tucked in around the boxes. I was about to toss the swing cinch over the top to lash the load down when a gob of something fell from the top pack and landed at my feet. It looked like a sealed plastic container filled with either lard or tallow. It was inside a plastic bag that had been torn down one side. The package was about the size of a 3-pound coffee can, only shorter. It was soft, and was an off-color yellow and dirty-looking. The only way to get it back on the mule was to rip off the pack cover and tuck the thing back into the plastic bundle. I was so anxious to get out of McKie because of the spooky feeling, I took one more look at the gooey gob and tossed it out into the timber. Maybe the deer and other animals would eat it up.

Big Red was busy on his feet to the point that it made it difficult to tie his load down. A packer loses his patience when he is holding slack with one hand and trying to pull the lash rope from under the two hind feet of a 1200-pound mule with the other. But, after about two or three minutes, I was at his left side doing up the surplus rope to tuck it under the lash up, and he was ready to go.

Suddenly, a terrible feeling crept over me. Goosebumps raised up at the center of my back and down my arms. If I had a gun strapped to my side like in the old days of packing, I'm sure that it would have been drawn and cocked, ready for action. What a spooky feeling!

Stella was tied short to a small tree and was moving around. She pulled back hard against her lead rope but, gave up quickly on account of the chain around her nose hurt too much. Robert, my big Arabian saddle horse, was chomping at his bit and moving around. He was unusually nervous, like he was standing in a bee's nest. There were no yellowjackets or hornets buzzing around. In fact, the flies were very scarce, and there were no mosquitoes at all. Generally, the stock would stand still, resting and half asleep after a long trip. It was very unusual to say the least.

A few seconds after the spooky feeling swept over me, causing goose bumps over my body, Big Red stepped quickly to the right and started switching his tail fast, back and forth and 'round and around. I've seen many a mule get scared and take off miles an hour. Their tails switching reminded me of airplane propellers going around so fast you could hardly see them. And that was the way Big Red's tail was doing now. I scolded him because of his movements and continued to do up the end of unused lash rope. Being bent slightly forward, I was looking at the coil of rope toward the ground. Big Red was about three feet from me.

Then an unexplainable thing happened to me at that moment I'll never understand. Something

struck me on my right shoulder. It hit me on the point where the bone is closest to the surface, right at the top of the joint. It hurt so bad that, at first, it seemed like maybe I had been shot. It nearly knocked me to the ground. Big Red was trying hard to get away. My whole arm was numbed, and my shoulder was completely immobile. There was nothing that glanced off my shoulder and hit the ground. Because, if something hit me that hard, surely it would have landed by me and would have been noticed.

Quickly, I glanced around in every direction. There was no one behind the shelter; nor did any movement catch my eye. Boy, did my shoulder hurt. I was scared, and came blame near turning the mule loose, and climbing up on Robert and getting the heck away from the place.

The mules and horse never took their eyes off the trail across the meadow toward Solace. From that moment on it was tough. I was scared, my shoulder was killing me, and I still had about 160 pounds to load on Stella.

One thing that really bothered me was the way my mules and horse were acting up. Stella mule pulled back so hard and see-sawed around until the chain on her halter cut her chin. Blood dripped from the wound. Lucky the lead ropes were strong half inch hemp. Big Red would blow his nose and jump around like he was standing in a bee's nest. Now and then the horse would whinny and try to escape. They never settled down for a moment. Even back at Woodruff Meadows, home base, they remained spooky for the next month. It even rubbed off on the horses that didn't make the trip.

With great effort and clinched teeth, somehow I pushed up the heavy boxes and top pack of more garbage. The load balanced out with one bundle of shakes on the off side. Then came the pack cover which was almost impossible to get over the high load with one arm. My shoulder finally came to life so I could move it around, but it hurt so bad

it made me about half sick. It took a few more moments to pack loose hand tools behind the ropes after Stella's load was lashed down tight. The stock was rearing to go.

There was no need to lead my mules because their loads were well balanced. So each lead rope was tied back to their saddles with slack, enough to get their heads down to graze along the way.

A quick check on the cinch of my riding saddle assured me I could ride hard if necessary. Robert was on his way before my right foot found the stirrup. The two mules scattered in a confused state of mind, but finally took to the trail I was on.

Stella caught up and stayed close. Her eyes were big, and her long black ears were pointed back toward the shelter. Big Red heard or felt something and stopped, turned for one last look, then spooked and came running as fast as his legs could push him along. It was a wonder he didn't snap a breast collar or britchin strap the way he took off.

His actions scared Stella so bad she nearly ran right out from under her load as she bounded away up the switchbacks toward the first plateau. Big Red tried to cut across one switchback to get ahead, but a big boulder and a clump of brush prevented him from getting around.

I always keep close watch of my mules, especially when we first start out with heavy loads. During the first quarter of a mile, a packer can usually tell if everything is balanced and is likely to stay. Thank goodness my loads balanced out perfectly on this trip. My shoulder was stiffening up again and hurt so bad there was no position that would ease the pain. I thought maybe a bone was broken. The extremely alert feeling was more intense than ever now.

Just off the next switchback above the first plateau, I saw something that never came to my attention before. Off to my right is what

appeared to be a rather deep long canyon, and not very wide, maybe 100 yards or so. On the yon side is a large rock, high and wide, sort of broken up, like maybe there were holes or cracks. There is some kind of brush or grass growing from these places. But the area there is rough, and I think it may be impassable with a horse or mules. Nevertheless, I intend to visit the place sometime, because when my gaze first spotted it, an excited feeling crept over me. A feeling of great anticipation. I wonder what is there that might be unusual?

We came to the summit quicker than ever before. The mules were sweating and puffing. Robert seemed relieved when we broke over the top. It would be another hour before we'd get to the big fifth-wheel trailer and unload the cargo. The mules were still quite uneasy and kept looking back up the trail. Most anything that came into view wouldn't have come as a shock or surprise. Our nerves were as tight as drum strings. If there would have been a sudden loud noise, like a gun shot, I'm sure my mules would have snapped every leather strap that touched their bodies, especially Big Red. He had about ten times more strength than he really needed. It doesn't take much to set him to going either.

At the crossing where Bessie Creek meanders down through the timber, Robert never hesitated at all about the muddy crossing. Both mules crossed over the rickety bridge, stepping over the broken boards.

Things seemed to settle down after that. We dropped downhill and finally we could see the big green trailer and powder blue pickup through the trees. What a welcome sight! My horse and mules settled down after they were tied short, and their heavy loads pulled off. They were covered with lather and sweat. It took me almost an hour to unpack and load the heavy cargo on the pickup and in the trailer. I took a few moments to eat some

lunch and down some hot coffee. I downed some aspirin to maybe knock the pain in my shoulder and arm.

All the feelings, excitement, alertness, and everything else that took place passed through my mind many times as I rode out of McKie. I sorted out every single detail, trying to figure out what was going on. My restless mules and horse, coupled with the feeling that kept me in stitches, was far beyond my comprehension. All I knew was that something had struck me a terrible blow on my right shoulder, and it still hurts bad. I wasn't going to tell a soul about what happened, because it would sound too much like a Bigfoot story or some of the things you hear about flying saucers. But, by the time we pulled out for home base from the Tom and Jerry trail head, I knew it would be impossible for me to unload all the stuff from the pickup and trailer. I had to tell my story.

I don't know why my animals and I reacted the way we did. But all I know is that it was so real and vivid, and there was definitely an impact. Something struck me very hard, and I do not know what it was. But whatever struck me came straight down. It was not a glancing blow. I stood beneath a Hemlock tree. The foliage was broad across. The limbs were close together and had light-colored moss poking out here and there. My mule and I were sheltered by the tree. If a dead limb fell from the tree, it would have landed at my feet. A spent bullet couldn't have come down through the heavy thick foliage and hit me with such impact. Someone tossing a rock or even shooting a rock with a sling shot would have been a glancing blow. The projectile would have hit Big Red too. But he was acting up before my shoulder was struck.

Someone said there was a cramped muscle or muscle spasm that caused the pain. Where the hurt was, there wasn't any muscle. It's shoulder bone, and, on me, it is less than 1/4 inch down to it. Most of my friends believe me when I tell them what

happened. Some of them want to ride in and see if the same feeling comes to them. I don' t believe it will, nor do I believe it will ever happen to me again. But I tell you what! I'm not traveling alone the next time a McKie trip comes up.

The incident occurred on the 30th day of July. It is now the 26th day of August and I still can't sleep on my right side. My shoulder gets to hurting so bad at times, it wakes me up. Even as I write, I feel a tightness that causes slight pain at the point of impact. For about a week, there was a swollen red place about as big around as a 25¢ piece, and raised up maybe a 1/16th of an inch. Today, there is a noticeable difference as we compare my right shoulder with the left one. It still hurts, but is slowly getting back to normal. One main problem is I keep reinjuring it nearly every day.

I went to the Medford Clinic and had an X-ray taken. The doctor said there was a slight bone displacement at the point of impact, and a bruised muscle.

I wrote about my McKie experience because it is my desire to share it with others. And maybe it will encourage other people to share some similar experiences they may have had, but are afraid no one would believe them, or make fun and embarrass them to no end.

But, what I say here is true, and worst of all, there is no way to prove it. My shoulder still hurts, and the feeling comes back time after time as my mind and thoughts go back and, in effect, re-enact all that took place, so maybe I could find an answer as to what hit me. One thing that continually re-occurs to me: If I had of pulled the pack cover off Big Red and tucked that gob of gunk back in the garbage on his back, would I have been struck? But I tossed it into the trees hoping some animal might eat it and be glad it was there.

My next trip to McKie may be about 1980. Until then, the mystery at McKie shelter will come to my

mind many times as it happened. I need to try to change my feeling about that beautiful place.

One day, as I was thinking of what happened to me, I thought about what the people camped there told me one day when I rode in with supplies. As I sat with the group of ten young men and women, one of the leaders said, "Oh, you should tell Gordon what we heard last night."

Off to the north of their camp, about 2:30 a.m., there was a flash of light and a pulsating, whirring noise that started out gradually. It was louder as the noise got close by, then drifted to the right toward Mudjekeewis Mountain. It was weird, but quite real. I wish now that I would have pursued that story a little further. It was after that when I got hit.

The month of August was a spooky time. After I got struck on the shoulder and my animals acted the way they did, there were two other incidents that were very real and spooky, and once during hunting season later on. All three involved horses and mules.

A local man and his wife, whose names I never heard, planned a week-long trip or campout on the Pacific Crest Trail. Their plans were to spend the night at McKie and head south from there. They were riding two gentle horses and had three horses to use to pack their supplies. All five head were the most gentle horses anyone could ever own.

The man and his wife loaded 'em up, tied 'em down, and headed east up the Tom and Jerry Trail. It was a beautiful summer day in every respect and had all the earmarks of a dandy outing.

About a mile or so up the trail there is an open flat that parallels the trail more or less. That place always drew my attention for some reason, but I never ventured out into it. It was right here that the horse the husband rode started acting strange. He never thought too much about it until his wife's horse began to get stubborn and didn't want to walk up the trail. One of the pack

horses jerked loose and trotted back down the trail, but stopped and started pawing the ground.

From there on to the summit things got worse. The pack horses were acting up more. They would try to pass one another along the way. Just shy of the ridge top, the husband's big saddle horse actually tried to buck his rider off. Finally they reached the summit and started the gradual descent toward McKie.

For the first hundred yards on the southeast slope there are just a few trees with no ground cover. Parts of the trail have washed out, shallow ditches here and there. Along here, the woman's horse reared up on his hind legs and pawed the air. She almost fell off. At the same moment his horse started bucking again. All three pack horses started acting up and one lost his load.

Both people got down and tied their saddle horses to a couple trees and rounded up the pack stock. For some reason all five animals refused to head down into McKie basin. The two fun-lovers had to abort their trip. All this time they too felt spooky, cold chills and goose bumps. This happened about a week after my incident.

A few days later, a similar incident occurred near the junction of the Pacific Crest and McKie Trails. Three people had been traveling on the Pacific Crest (old Skyline) Trail for several days using five pack animals. They had planned to make camp at McKie Shelter because of the open meadows with plenty of grass. Less than half a mile down the trail to McKie, two saddle horses started bucking, and that caused a chain reaction. All the animals seemed to go nuts for no visible reason.

Soon the riders became quite uneasy. They tied their saddle horses to trees and subdued all five pack animals, and repacked a couple. There was something down there in that canyon ahead that the animals didn't want anything to do with. One of the riders decided he was going on toward McKie and check things out.

About an hour later he came back up the trail leading his horse. He had been thrown off twice. The man was in bad shape. No bones broken, but he took a terrible beating. The saddle horse was jumpy and wild-eyed, and kept looking back toward McKie. The three men decided to continue on down the Pacific Crest Trail and maybe camp at Ranger Springs.

Another incident happened along the east end of the Halifax Trail that fall. A middle-aged hunter had spent the night at Solace Cow Camp. He rode one horse and used another one to pack with.

That night it got mighty cold. It was cloudy and looked like a storm was moving in. The hunter pulled out around 10 a.m., and headed west toward the breaks of the Middle Fork of Rogue River. He also had a small dog with him.

About a half mile from the cabin, something struck the rider and knocked him off his horse. He laid on the ground for nearly an hour before he came to. His dog had curled up next to him and helped keep him warm. About that time, luckily, some others spotted the body and came to the rescue. He didn't seem to suffer any bad effects.

He was hit in the head with something. There was a bruise just back from his left temple. On impact, he was riding across an opening. There were no trees within a hundred feet. Both horses were grazing in the meadow nearby, and spooked at the slightest movement. The man lay there almost an hour before he was discovered.

All five of these incidents happened right at, or within two miles of, McKie Shelter. Many folks who have heard my story blame the unusual occurrences on Indian spirits, flying saucers, or Big Foot. No one knows the answer, but I am sure of one thing, all these stories are real and true.

CHAPTER FIVE
MYSTERY LIGHTS AND FIRE

When I started out working for the U.S. Forest Service, every year about the middle of the month of June, the district conducted a week long school to teach new men how to fight fire, chase smoke, etc. There would be almost 120 people, including instructors on board at once.

We stayed all week at a place called Camp 2. It used to house a full-fledged C.C.C. group during the 1930's, and some of 1940. The third year I was assistant camp boss, and also kept the big shots posted if anything important came in by radio or telephone.

That year we got blasted with a real dandy, wet lightning storm. It pounded things good from Dead Indian Highway, north, to beyond Crater Lake. The storm was five to eight miles wide.

A man was dispatched to the Blue Rock tower, overlooking Blue Canyon, and another one up to Rustler Peak. They were sent to those places earlier in the day after the weather bureau predicted a 90% chance of lightning.

After supper that evening a fire report came in from our man on Blue Rock. At first he was quite excited about a fire that seemed to come to life rather quickly. In fact, he turned it in before a lookout report was made, i.e.. azimuth, township, range, section, etc. Several of us were present at the time of his radio message.

On the Blue Canyon side of Smith Rock, a flickering light materialized for a short time and died down. The reflection was still visible. That was when he turned it in. It would continue to flair up and die down. The mysterious part was the color of the flame, and also its shape.

My boss gave me the names of three men to round up. They were going to be dispatched to the fire. In less than ten minutes they were on their way.

They took a one ton pumper truck that was also equipped with a couple fire packs, in case they had to chase smoke in the remote area.

Meanwhile the Blue Rock Lookout said that the fire had moved around to the north side of Smith Rock, and was nearly invisible. It seemed to be moving west. The pumper truck left Camp 2 and headed up the Parker Meadows Road. It was at least ten miles to the junction of Blue Rock.

The road from there to the top of the mountain cuts its way up through the Cat Hill Burn. Slick leaf brush and Chinkapin grow thick and high for much of the distance. The road was steep, rough, narrow, and crooked.

The lookout was in constant communications with the Camp 2 dispatcher. Something mighty odd was taking place. He was quite excited.

The distance from Parker Meadows Road to the tower was around nine miles. About half way along, they started uphill on a tangent of maybe 1/4 mile, then it heads around to the south side of the hill and down across a narrow canyon.

Just as they made a turn and headed up the straightaway, a reflection of an extremely bright light started to show up. At first it resembled a lightning strike except for two things. The storm had already passed by for almost two hours, and the reflection kept getting brighter.

The driver brought the pumper truck to a halt and the three men watched in shocked amazement. A light slowly appeared before them. It was just a little less than 1/4 mile away. It came down the road straight toward them. Very slowly, the driver pressed the mic button, and all the dispatcher could hear was static, no transmission.

There was no way to turn the rig around, nor could he see how to back down the dark road. One man panicked and jumped out. When he came to his senses a little, he jumped back in the rig and locked the door.

The object floated several feet above the roadway and covered about 40 feet from side to side. The men were scared stiff. It was going to hit them head on! One of the men described the thing as an airplane with three wide, bright headlight beams.

It got to within a hundred feet or so and slowly started to gain altitude. It passed right over the top of the truck and three mighty scared men. One man hid his head between his knees in fright, and the driver held both arms up to shield his eyes from the glare. The young school teacher who sat in the middle wore glasses. He watched as the thing passed over. Said a dark, wide shape of a frame or body protruded out away from the bright glare. It appeared to be rounded at the front and tapered off more narrow at the back.

After the three men came to their senses they bailed out to watch and look. There wasn't a thing in sight. Everything looked exactly like it did before as near as they could tell, it being such a dark night.

When the object passed over them, there was a noise like a sudden fast breeze blowing through tree tops, except for one thing. There were no trees nearby, just brush. Once more the driver tried his radio. It worked perfectly. He reported what happened. The dispatcher advised them to find a place to turn around and head for camp.

For the next couple hours the three men were questioned separately by fire staff people. Each one told the same story in their version. My boss got the young school teacher to one side alone and took notes as he related his story. He was a very reputable man, and the boss felt that what he said was true.

All that ever became of this incident was we had four mighty jittery men on our hands. In fact, the one who manned Blue Rock Lookout that night flatly refused to return there again.

Thunder clouds over Cascade Divide

Thunder clouds anvilled out, Cascade Divide

CHAPTER SIX
FIRE BALL RIDGES, TWO GREAT DIVIDES

During the early 1950's, I knew of 14 lookouts on the Forest. Those who manned the fire detection stations moved in the last of June or the first of July. Those who were at the more remote stations stayed there all summer, no breaks. But the ones that were accessible by car, generally were taken care of by a man and wife team, a perfect setup.

One of these places was Rustler Peak, located on the Butte Falls District. It was also a communications hub. A two way forest frequency and telephone kept those two in constant touch with headquarters if necessary.

The beautiful, cloudless skies seen from the high mountain peaks were certainly a fringe benefit, especially at night. The high altitude breeze got a little chilly after the sun went down. But mosquitoes never bothered and other flying bugs didn't exist.

Many a man and woman have stood out on the catwalks and enjoyed such beautiful settings. Stars seem to be so close. High mountain peaks would be silhouetted in front of a new moon, slowly appearing in the eastern sky.

On one such evening, the man and wife team, whose names were Howard and Liz, stood out on the catwalk at Rustler Peak Lookout. The tower is 30 feet high with a 14' x 14' house on top. That was their home for the summer.

The moon was high in the sky about 3/4 in size. Various objects reflected its light, and night animals and noisy birds were really on the move. Their gaze was focused on the highest peak in Southern Oregon, Mt. Pitt, (McLaughlin). It stood high in the sky, 9495 feet. The moonlight reflected off the snow still clinging to its north slopes around the crater.

As they stood enjoying the scene toward the eastern horizon, something started to happen just north of Blue Rock. There was a slight glow, barely visible. It resembled the faint glare when the moon first starts to show. But the moon tonight was high. The glow was brightening up.

As the two people watched, a huge ball of light slowly rose above the horizon and quivered for a minute or two. It moved toward the south, staying about 50' or 100' above the Cascade Divide. It never changed in size, and was extremely bright. The color was light yellow to a dark orange toward the outside edge. It moved along real slow toward Mt. Pitt.

Howard and Liz watched in amazement as it drifted along. He estimated the size of the glowing ball at least 30' in diameter, and maybe larger. It always stayed well above the ground, in fact, there were times when they could see sky beneath the object. It kept getting closer to the tall mountain. Finally it collided about halfway between the tree line and the top. There was a huge puff of light blue smoke and shortly they heard a muffled boom. Everything went back to normal. This incident happened in August, 1954.

Another situation similar to the fire balls mentioned happened in late July, 1968, on the old Union Creek District. I was the Fire Control Officer at the time.

I put one man, by the name of George, up on Hershberger Mountain, Umpqua Divide. Another young man, whose name was Roy, was on Stella Mountain. About 11 p.m., Roy walked out on the catwalk for one last look around. The tower is 30' high.

It was a clear night, and the stars really shined bright. As he walked around the house on the catwalk, he spotted something odd to the north. He ran in and grabbed his field glasses to maybe get a better look. Sure enough, he had spotted a fire, he thought.

Roy started to get on the phone and call me, but at the same moment the fire raised high above the horizon and bounced around, back and forth. About the same time George had spotted the same thing. I heard the telephone ring one time, but never thought too much about it. But it was the two men drawing each other's attention.

George said the brilliant object was in the vicinity of Long Prairie, five miles due south of Hershberger Mtn. Roy figured it looked to be about a half mile west of Rabbit Ears on a high ridge.

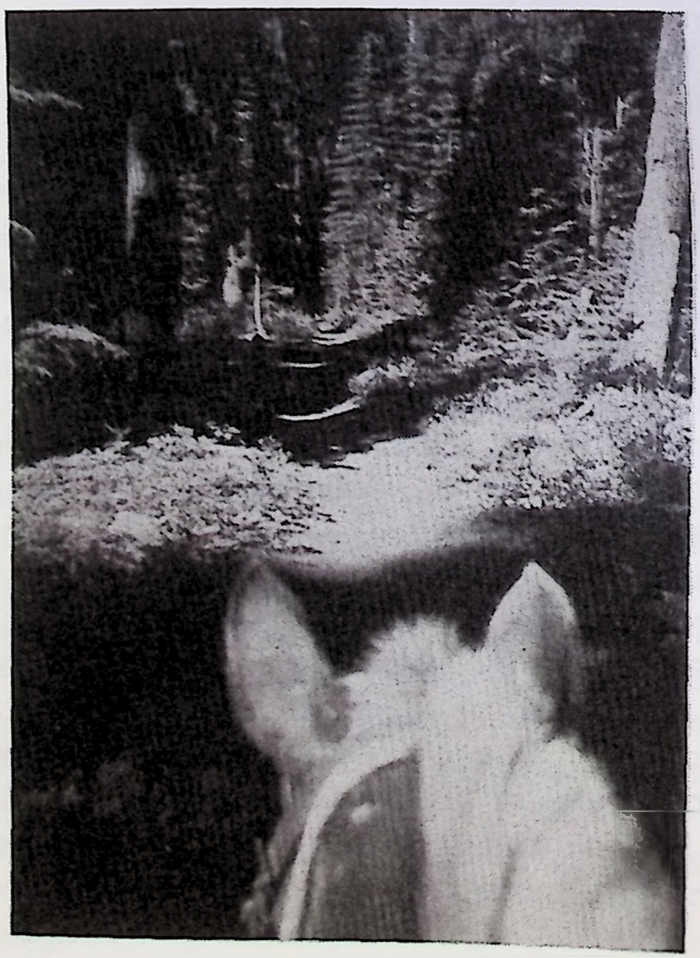
Their conversation didn't bother anyone else on the district as they argued back and forth. Finally it went in a westerly direction for a mile or so, staying high above ground. Soon it headed south and started to decrease in size or was going further away. It disappeared west of Stella Mountain.

There was no noise, no smoke, or anything but the bright glow of a fire ball in the sky. George was one of the best lookout people I ever saw during my nine years as a Fire Control Officer. Roy was new on the job, but I knew they wouldn't tell the story if it wasn't true.

The next day after they told me about the bright object, I visited each man and got their accounts of what they had witnessed. Roy figured it was a sure enough flying saucer. He even thought that maybe Indian spirits was the cause of such things. But George's idea seemed more reasonable.

He said when conditions were just right, these things occur. Said it was no doubt a ball of static electricity. Maybe it came from deep inside the earth, caused by a slight shift in a fault, way down there. The electricity followed through cracks and ways of least resistance. When it came to the surface and hit the air was when it became visible to the human eye.

Mt. Pitt (McLaughlin)



Pacific Crest Trail and Horse Patches

CHAPTER SEVEN
WINDS OF MUDJEKEEWIS

I, myself, have witnessed several weird things, such as noises, feelings, and actual sightings that couldn't be explained. But it did make me realize that a large percentage of the stories I had heard were true.

When someone lines up a large star with a tree top on a ridge, the star seems to be moving much faster than it really is. Hence, it is believed to have been a flying saucer. On a moonlit night, as you look at an object long enough, it will seem to move around. One of the times this happened to me was on the road to Blue Rock Trail head.

I was parked at a heliport about two miles up. I had driven to the area to meet two women who had been camped in Blue Canyon for a few days. It was in the late fall, and there was a couple inches of snow on the ground.

I drove a big Ford pickup and towed a two-horse pull trailer. I arrived on site a couple hours early, but it was dark. The women had to walk down from the saddle because the snow was too deep for my two wheel drive rig.

I started the pickup motor so the heater could warm the inside of the cab. When I felt comfortable I flipped off the ignition, and everything was quiet. As I waited, many thoughts came to mind about past experiences in this country as I rode across the forest floor day and night. My reminiscing slowly came to a halt.

I was looking at a large object near the main road about 75 feet from me. Suddenly I saw it move. It resembled a huge black bear that was pawing the dirt in slow motion. Its whole body moved around but it wasn't going anywhere. A cold chill ran up my back and down both arms. I checked to see if my pistol was loaded. Adrenalin started to flow some.

Soon I could not stand it anymore. I flipped the ignition switch and the big motor came to. I turned on the head lights. There, as bright as day, was a big jagged rock left there by the road builders.

It was difficult to believe that my vision could play tricks on me like that. Although I had seen such movements many times, especially on moonlit nights. Even so, it was very exciting. In fact, I spent the next hour entertaining myself as my fixed gaze on most anything I looked at would start to move around.

Sightings like this, and many other unexplainable happenings, makes the adrenalin flow, and will cause gross excitement in most people. There are certain places in the forest, especially on the Cascade Divide, where wind plays a big part in stirring a feller's imagination.

On a ridge top where there are a lot of rock and pinnacles sticking up or cliffs where cracks and crevices are, the wind will make unusual sounds. Indians named one mountain "Mudjekeewis", because the word meant "wind" in their language. They, perhaps, related the sounds to spirits or gods, I don't know for sure. But I do know that the wind blowing over sharp summits can play dirty tricks on an unsuspecting rider.

I was a trail boss, in charge of maintenance on the entire National Forest from 1974 until 1977. I covered 7 or 8 hundred miles a year, riding and getting the job done. There were close to 600 miles of forest trails including 140 miles of the Pacific Crest (Old Oregon Skyline Trail).

One Friday in the fall of the year, I took two extra horses and a couple pack mules into McKie to haul out trail crew supplies. It was a nasty day to say the least. I got an early start, and rode in on the Tom and Jerry Trail. When I arrived, the two men had everything ready to go. The trail maintenance was done except one small leg, about

two miles, out-going, toward Mudjekeewis summit. We would go out that way.

On the east slope the wind blew some, mostly in mild gusts. The clouds were heavy overhead, and a storm was brewing. We loaded up, tied 'em down, and hit the trail. It took maybe ten minutes to eliminate an eight foot chunk from the downed tree that crossed our path. I took the lead from there on. We could hear the wind blowing across the rugged ridges, and at times it really did sound like someone moaning and hollering, or loud whistling noises coming from various nooks and crannies.

About 50 feet from the summit, we pulled up to look back at McKie Basin and size up the oncoming storm. We were right beneath a southwest wind blowing in 30 to 50 mile an hour gusts. It was cold and starting to rain.

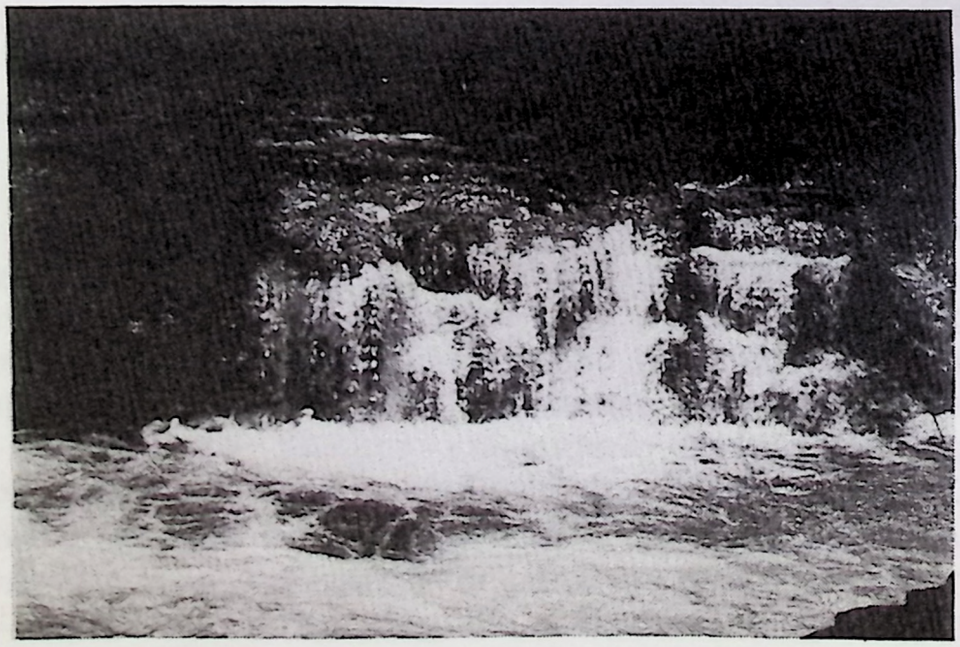
Just as I got to the summit my big half Arab horse stopped, raised up on his hind feet slightly, and fell backwards and on to his right side. I bailed off just as his front feet left the ground. I watched in shocked amazement. My horse passed out. His mouth was wide open, and his tongue was blue. I couldn't see his eyes. I just knew he had a heart attack.

When my horse fell he was more or less down, out of the stiff, cold breeze. In a moment he struggled to his feet and shook himself. I led him back down the trail aways to a flat place and looked my horse over. The weather was getting worse. We had to leave.

I led the old boy up to the top and got the full force of the wind. It was then I realized, the sudden blast of wind simply took my horse's breath away. I walked right in front of him for the next hundred yards, down the other side. In fact the first blast of the fierce wind almost took our breath away too. I climbed up and rode him from there on. We came to a cut off trail that

went across to the Tom and Jerry. From there, it was another three mile ride to the trailer.

Gordon Jesse Walker and Horse, Patches, Union Creek Corral



Falls on North Fork of Rogue River, Hamaker Country

CHAPTER EIGHT
DANIEL SPRINGS FRIGHT

For quite sometime I was in charge of the reforestation program on the Butte Falls District. The District Ranger gave me full reign to set up experiments in places where it was tough to get trees to grow. I had to document everything me and my men attempted to do.

One such place was a rocky knob about a mile northeast of the South Fork Dam on Rogue River. The area was northwest of Imnaha Guard Station and quite wild and primitive. The knob covered maybe 10 acres in size. When the timber was cut, huge stumps indicated that dirt must be close to the surface, although all that you could see was anything from huge outcroppings to broken-up chunks of brown hard rock. There was no visible dirt. This tree-producing rock pile could become quite a project.

The first thing I had in mind was to do a little research. A friend of mine who lived in Shady Cove knew more about getting trees to grow than any Forest Service man I have ever met. He and I had been friends for many years. In fact he taught me how to fly an airplane in the early 1950's.

I drove from Butte Falls to Shady Cove to see Tommy one day to get some advice. He was always glad to pass information on to someone who meant business about growing trees. He owned and operated a setup where he collected cones from all conifers and other seed sources. Tommy not only gathered them himself, but also bought hundreds of bushels of cones from many cone gatherers, including myself.

He gave me another tour through his plant and showed me some new equipment he invented. One of those things was called a winding machine.

First, all cones must go through a drying-out process so they will shed their seeds. Then the cones are put on a shaker. It is a big square screen with the right size openings for seeds to pass through. The cone debris is then discarded, and the seeds are ready to be put through the winding process.

Many of these are spent seeds that didn't develop into solid, fertile seeds. They are much lighter than the good ones and are blown away. The heavy good seeds drop down into a wooden bin.

Tommy never threw any of the spent seeds away. He pointed toward a stack of 80 pound gunny sacks that were all full of spent seeds. Said that about 10% of those tree seeds were sound. So, what he did was haul them along the next time he went to the woods and broadcast (hand-scattered) them in logged off areas and other openings. The results were good. Said he saw some of those places that looked like a lawn, the trees were so thick.

I told him about my 10 acre rock pile. He gave me ten sacks of spent seeds. Said the best time to put the seeds out was on top of three or four inches of snow in the fall or early winter, if possible. That way the dark colored seeds would sink in, so birds and animals wouldn't gather them all.

I hauled the seeds home and stored them in a Forest Service warehouse. Some of the foresters pooh-poohed the idea. Said it was just time spent for nothing. But my boss, the District Ranger, said, "Fly at it."

On a cold wintery day I took one man with me who was just as interested in such things, like getting trees to grow. There was snow on site, from four to six inches deep. Just right. We had to walk in almost a mile, over an old road that was nearly grown over with brush. It was part of an old burn.

The sacks were light, and we each carried two. By noon we had broadcast six 80 pound sacks of

spent seeds over the 10 acre plot. (Each sack weighed maybe 30 pounds.) Now for the long wait to see what would take place.

The seeds would soon be under six to eight feet of snow through the winter. The good ones would become stratified, (swelled up and ready to sprout), by spring. As the snow melted off, tree seeds would work their way down between the rocks and maybe take hold in the soil.

The following early summer we went back to see what was happening. Sure enough, seeds were sprouting everywhere. I made three more trips to the site before winter closed in again. The area resembled a lawn in places. Apparently my venture was going to be a success.

Now I told my true story about the special remote place so the reader can understand how many times I went there. Even the Ranger walked in with me and my little black dog called Snoopy. I have eaten my lunch there while Snoopy teased the pine squirrels. But my last trip was one of the most hair-raising, weird experiences, I've ever been through and lived to tell about it.

It was the middle of September, 1959. I drove down the old road that used to pass fairly close to South Fork Dam. A wide place marked my take off spot out to the rocky knob. This would be my last trip in. The new trees were right at two years old. Snoopy was delighted. There were three or four digging places where squirrels had teased him, and that's right where he headed. The day was nice. There were few clouds in the sky, and it was cool enough to wear a coat.

About half way to my destination, I got sort of a creeping feeling. I stopped to look and listen, and patted my gun hanging at my left side. (Ruger Single 6-22) A slight cold chill went up my back. Cautiously I continued on. Soon here came my little black dog, half running, half trotting. He was whimpering and looking back toward a rise out ahead.

I reached down to pet him but he wouldn't stand still. He cowered between my feet and was whining and whimpering. I could tell by his eyes that he was scared half to death. At that point I checked my revolver to make sure it was loaded and started to continue on. Cold chills went up my back and down each arm. I felt kind of weak and depressed, or something. What in the world was causing this awful feeling? (As I write this story, I get that same feeling again.) Snoopy was about to go nuts.

My dog headed toward the pickup but soon turned back to me. Twice he did that. I picked the little 13 pound fellow up and tucked him under my coat. He was shaking uncontrollably. Right then I decided to depart.

I put Snoopy back down and he couldn't get close enough to me. He was whining and carrying on really bad. Finally, again, he headed for the pickup, trying his best to get me to follow. That did it.

Snoopy stayed just ahead of me. I started walking at a normal pace, then got a little faster. Within a hundred yards of the pickup we were both running as fast as we could. The overhanging brush was just popping as we raced along. Snoopy was so scared I thought he might pass out.

Quickly I unlocked the pickup door. My dog jumped in and hid himself beneath the heater on the passenger side. He never quit shaking. I relocked the door and sat there for a moment and got myself pulled together.

Snoopy had been with me on many a pack trip, day and night. I have seen him chase and tree several black bear, much to his delight. The first one he put up a tree, I shot it. After that my little dog just couldn't understand how come I didn't kill the other nine head he treed during his life.

He and I have been in many a spooky place together on the Cascade Divide, but never did my dog act scared. I do know that our fright was not

caused by an animal. It had to be something he couldn't see, but rather feel and smell. I never, ever, returned to the rocky knob again.

My dog acted nervous for a few days after our scare. I have thought about that place a lot, even after I retired from the Forest Service, in 1983. My dog, Snoopy, died at age 15 years. I doubt if I'll ever really forget what happened that day.

CHAPTER NINE
SIGHT AND SOUND OF TIMBER WOLVES

I, myself, am a natural born mountain man. I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, am one of seven generations who have lived here in the Rogue River Valley. For many years, my line of work was with horses, mules, and cattle. Much time was spent out in the wilderness, the tall and uncut, wild and wooly country, day and night.

There were times I've been so frightened by something out there, it was nearly impossible to move around. Night noises are good for causing goose bumps at times, and even during the day, I've been momentarily shook up, but soon, everything would go back to normal.

There is only one wild animal that will cause me to get all shook up by its presence, the timber wolf. In the 60 years I have rammed around in the wilderness, I've seen them, heard them, and found their tracks. The yapping howl of a pack of coyotes have sang me to sleep. I love their sound. But the long, loud howl of a single timber wolf causes my flesh to crawl, day or night.

My first encounter with wolves was during the depression years of the 1930's. We lived at the north end of the valley at a place called Beagle. Farmers and ranchers made up the population over a wide area.

Those years were mighty tough sledding for most people, although I believe country folks were a lot better off than those who lived in towns and cities. My cousin, Don Case, and I lived a mile apart. He, being a year older than I, more or less took the lead in most of our travels around about the countryside.

In those days we had to work hard from daylight until dark, seven days a week, to earn a living. It was difficult at times to keep food on the table during the long cold winter months. But he and I

had an out for that. We hunted deer at night. In present times, such activity is called poaching. We called it survival. If either of our families would have gotten sick of beans, potatoes, and doe meat, someone would have starved.

One late afternoon Don came by to visit. As the conversation went on, someone mentioned that it would sure be fitting to have a little deer meat to go along with those pinto beans. Of course, that rung a bell. Within a half hour or so Don and I were on our way to a dandy place, called Nerrigan Spring.

It was maybe a five mile drive, or three miles across country afoot. We decided it would draw less attention if we hiked to the site. Don and I arrived at our destination shortly after dark and shinnied up a Laurel tree, and placed ourselves on a big limb about ten feet above ground. The water spring was bubbling from the hillside beneath us.

Quietly we waited. Mosquitoes were a pest. When one landed, a quick slap of a hand to evict the critter was apt to frighten any deer away. So the only way was to reach up real slow and pry the thing loose so as not to draw attention.

In a short time Don turned on his two-cell flashlight for a look-see. Sure enough, a hundred feet away stood a dandy spike buck, looking right at us. Don pulled up, took aim, and tugged the trigger on his single shot 22. The slug from the shot hit dead center at the upper part of the animal's neck. Down he went.

Boy, did we ever start to scramble from our perch. I was the first one to hit the ground. Don landed above me, we collided, and I staggered around to keep from falling into the hole of water.

The deer was really thrashing around. One hind foot raked my shin bone from the ankle to my knee. While he bled the animal, I felt my leg to see if there was any hide left. He called me a sissy.

We each grabbed a leg and headed east toward a grove of oak and pine trees. Soon we approached a

dry wash. The banks were from four to six feet high. We were on a long, wide-centered sand bar. Live water trickled down one side.

After a short rest we dressed the deer out and headed for the road. En route we were now moving along with great caution. No noise or talking, whatsoever.

We decided to follow the wash toward what is now Dodge Road. At a certain point it would be necessary to check traffic and see if there were any parked cars waiting. It was important to consider every little thing to protect our activities.

Suddenly, cold chills covered my upper body and arms for no reason. A frightening feeling crept over me. In exactly the same instant Don stumbled against me, and in a whisper said, "How do you feel?" He, too, was experiencing the same thing.

We sat quietly for a short time to listen and sniff the air. There was absolutely nothing going on, but we both felt creepy and very uneasy. Don told me later about a sudden cold chill that crept over him. It happened at the same second I felt bad.

From that time on there were several tense moments experienced as we got our deer meat from there to our homes, which is a whole 'nother story.

The next day we told Don's Dad how we felt. He said we should go back and look for tracks along the sand bars and loose dirt. I borrowed my folk's car, and we returned to the site.

Carefully we crept along and soon came to the spot where we first felt the creepy feeling. We walked up the wash toward where the deer was dressed out. Our pistols were drawn and ready. Don and I walked abreast about six feet apart.

Finally we approached a wide place in the wash with a long sand bar along one side. We discovered what had caused us to be so frightened. Indented in the sand were two sets of tracks about

three feet apart. Don placed his hand over one, and the print showed up all the way around.

His Dad had told us that we would likely see tracks made by a mountain lion or wolves. We had been followed by two huge timber wolves. From where we discovered their tracks to the spot we first got cold chills was over a hundred yards. We counted seventeen visible wolf tracks in the sand.

From then on I learned that actual sightings of timber wolves was rare indeed. But there were many accounts of hill people hearing the mournful howl from one of the huge beasts.

My eight year old daughter, Janna, and I saw one in 1959, at the edge of an open flat, just off Rancheria Road, northeast of Butte Falls. The animal was like a huge, bushy, dirty-looking shepherd dog, except for one thing. Just before the wolf entered the timber it turned broad side and looked toward us. Its head was wide, and the ears were not very long. The animal's body was different shaped than a dog, and its tail hung down and curved outward at the end, even when it turned and trotted away, out of sight.

I have heard the howl of a single timber wolf out there in the wilderness country in broad daylight. It always causes goose bumps, and I wish I was somewhere else. And when I see wolf tracks near a high mountain pond or stream, it gives me that creepy feeling, the same as when Don and I shot the deer at Nerrigan Spring.

Gordon Jesse Walker

and Donald Monroe Case,

cousins

CHAPTER TEN
DAYLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT

Out there in the tall and uncut wilderness there are things moving and happening every second. If a person happens to be in certain places at the right time, they can see, hear, or smell evidence of mysteries happening. Believe me, I've been there.

When something takes place it does so in several different ways. A weird feeling lasts quite awhile, or until you leave where it took place. A sighting is short-lived, but quite intense. To hear a noise or sound you can't identify gives a feller a creepy, goose-bump raising feeling. There is no escape from any of this. One of these things happened to me during the summer of 1954.

It had been a tough day. I had made a pack trip to Devil's Peak Lookout with two mule loads of supplies. The lookout man was happy to see me for several reasons. Of course, number one was his mail.

I sat out on a rock ledge overlooking the Pacific Crest Trail and ate my lunch. I would soon be on that trail heading south toward Blue Canyon. There would be plenty of grass for my horse and three head of mules.

The fire detection man and I unloaded two of the mules. While he was putting things away, I took everything off my mule number three and distributed the load on all three critters, so it would be easier going. From Devil's Peak to my destination at Meadow Lake in Blue Canyon was around a 13 or 14 mile ride. At two and a half miles an hour I should be riding into camp around four o'clock p.m. The three man crew might show up around five thirty. I bid the man on Devil's Peak goodbye, mounted up and headed south. It would be a leisure ride, and something to look forward

to. In those days the Pacific Crest Trail was still the old Oregon Skyline Trail. It dropped off Devil's Peak in a series of switchbacks until it started across flat country where Sky Lakes are located. There are numerous lakes and snow-water ponds in that group. It is always confused with Seven Lakes Basin and Blue Canyon by a good many people.

I have ridden this trail day and night when the weather was beautiful. A full moon is so wonderful on a night ride. I've also been along this trail from Seven Lakes Basin to Blue Canyon when the weather was so cold, every joint in my body ached. When a packer has three or four head of mules in tow he doesn't dare get down and walk. If there was a runaway it would be just too bad.

Lake Isherwood was off the main trail aways, but I rode past Margaret Lake and between the Heavenly Twins and Deer Lake. Soon I came to Lake Land, and awhile later approached the north end of Red Lake.

Red Lake is long and wide. It was so named because of its shallow appearance. But out toward the center, running more or less north and south, is a deep channel. It shows up green in color and meanders back and forth like a giant snake. It varies in width. That is where the big fish are at.

Soon, Island Lake showed up through the trees ahead. It, too, is quite large. There is an island at each end. Generally the fishing is really good here. I rode around the south end of Island Lake, headed west. There was another five or six miles to ride.

The trail junction to Carry Lake showed up through the trees ahead. The beautiful, round lake sets on top of a flat-topped mountain. Old timers have told me that if you were unable to catch fish any place else in Blue Canyon, go to Lake Carry and catch your limit.

Horseshoe Lake glimmered in the sun. From there to the trail crew camp was just a short ride. Sure enough, no one was there yet. My little black dog, Snoopy, put the go to squirrels that were looking for goodies around camp.

I unpacked and unsaddled my horse and three mules. I turned the mules loose. Each one had a drag rope attached to a front foot. My horse had a stake rope attached to one front foot with a hobble. The 20 foot, half inch hemp was anchored hard and fast to a wooden peg, driven down into the soft soil about two feet. My critters would have plenty to eat all night long. I planned to spend the night.

Around 5:30 p.m., the tried, hard-working men came dragging in. Snoopy greeted them like long lost friends. He knew each one. As usual we all sat around a good-sized campfire and told stories about strange happenings out here in the wilderness.

We were camped at the south end of Meadow Lake. Some folks call it Mud Lake. Over many hundreds of years this good-sized lake at a large flat area has slowly silted in, squeezing the lake up toward the north end where the water is deep. No one tries to catch fish there because of the swampy appearance, but some of the biggest fish in Blue Canyon are at Meadow Lake.

Two men were already bedded down and were really snoring away. The foreman was catching up on his log books. I just sort of walked on by and prepared to snuggle down in my own bed that was wedged in between my saddle and rigging for three mules. Snoopy had a special bed rigged up between two pack boxes placed a couple feet apart with some pack saddle pads to lay on. I draped a pack cover over the top to keep the cold night air off his body. The moment my head hit the pillow I was asleep. I had ridden over 30 miles that day.

One thing I have always carried with me all the many years I led a pack string is a good bed.

Inside my sleeping bag is an air mattress, a couple extra covers, and a pillow. Also, there is a piece of light canvas (sail cloth), 3 x 4 foot. One end is placed under my pillow at the back. When I turn in, the other end is pulled over my face. It extends down aways, and there are enough wrinkles in the cloth so fresh air comes through, but mosquitoes can't find me. I only used it when they were bad, or if it was really cold. Tonight I didn't need it.

After being in the saddle for 12 or 14 hours, leading a 3 or 4 mule string of mules, a packer needs a good night's sleep. That, plus good food, is what keeps him going, day after day. A sleepful night passes by faster than any other time in a feller's life, and generally it takes quite a jolt to rouse him. But around 1 a.m. the next morning, something was going on that woke me up.

The first thing I noticed was a sudden wind whipping the tree tops right overhead. My horse whinnied, and I could hear a mule or two moving around. I sat upright, and about 30 feet away, I noticed that the trail crew foreman was balanced, leaning back on his elbows, looking out across the meadow. As we watched, a weird thing took place.

Suddenly there was a brilliant flood of light. It was as bright as a high noon, sunshiny day. It lasted for almost one minute. The really strange thing was, we could see the horse and three mules grazing contentedly, switching their tails like normal.

The foreman stood up, so did one of the other men. I stayed put, and Snoopy came from his bed and looked around, as though he thought the sun had come up. We never saw from where it came. It flared up and died out, like flipping the switch on a giant flashlight. It lit up the entire area around us.

The foreman and I rolled out at daylight. My horse nickered at me, and one mule meandered over to get a helping of oats. Snoopy started searching

for something to chase. We discussed at great lengths about what happened, and never did arrive at any decision as to what caused such brightness. I never heard tell of such a sighting before on since, but this is a true story I will never forget.

Molly and Dillon; Pond is half mile east of Hemlock Lake

Pack string on Pacific Crest Trail, Devil's Peak

CHAPTER ELEVEN
McALLISTER SPOOKS

All my life I have heard of premonitions, extra sensory perception, and weird feelings. It seems to me that I was getting my fair share of such things. But they always occurred somewhere in the Cascade Mountains or adjacent to them.

During the 31 years I worked on the Rogue River National Forest, I spent 16 of those years riding from the middle of May until the first of November. My saddle horses and mules got quite a workout. My travels took me over, up and down, three great divides, the Umpqua, Cascade, and Siskiyou, and I would ride from 800 to 1500 miles a year. I've worn out two horses a day many times. Sometimes, during fire season, I was in the saddle seven days a week, all hours of the day and night, for over two months a year.

I guarantee that many an anxious moment has arisen that made the adrenalin flow and caused me to be quite alert for awhile, night and day. Leading a pack string is a never-ending life of excitement. During all those years there were never any two minutes alike.

But many times the feelings would occur, and my horses and mules were a hundred miles away. During my career on the Forest I was an assistant to a District Ranger doing something on four districts for 16 years, nine of which was spent as a Fire Control Officer.

In 1963, when I was an F.C.O. on the Ashland District, I had made my rounds on the east side, Fish Lake country, at Robinson Butte, Big Elk Guard Station, and one slash piling crew. When I left Big Elk Guard Station, it was around 1 p.m.

At Highway 140, it seemed like it would be a good time to eat lunch. I knew of a place about five miles down, where a good road pulled off the pavement and wound its way to the top of a long

ridge. There had been some logging activity there a few years back, and debris had been burned out. It overlooked a huge flat called Willow Prairie. I had been there a good many times while working on the Butte Falls District.

Every time there was a chance it was good to park and eat lunch at the highest point in the area. That way I would have communications with headquarters at Ashland, all my people on lookouts, and surrounding country if there happened to be a forest fire take off.

It took maybe ten minutes to work my way toward the ridge top. About a hundred feet from the summit a weird feeling started to creep in on me. My first reaction was to stop, turn around and leave. But I continued on. The feeling got more intense. Cold chills traveled up my back.

At the top there was a wide, long, cleared off area. I made a turn, but didn't allow enough room to get clear around. I felt deeply depressed and withdrawn, a feeling that is not true of me in any way. Reverse gear was somewhere there in the four speed transmission, but where? Soon it ground into place, and my pickup went backward. I felt so absolutely awful my mind wouldn't work, and thoughts seemed to go in reverse. It was almost impossible to get headed out. I was scared.

Finally, there, directly in my path, was the road leading out. Cautiously I started back toward Highway 140. As soon as my rig came to the spot where I first felt weird, things started going back to normal, but my thoughts were still all fouled up. My Forest radio hadn't been saying a thing, but before I lined out down Highway 140, there was a steady conversation going on all the time. When one station shut up, another would chime in.

McAllister Soda Spring used to be about two miles east of the Rogue Forest boundary. When Highway 140 was constructed, the spring got ruined, but a roadway was retained to the site. It was at

least six miles from where the awful feeling took over, and it seemed like a good place to eat lunch.

Like all the other times that similar occurrences happened to me, I gave it much thought. To this day it's still impossible to arrive at some conclusion as to what was going on.

A couple years later, me and one of the office people were out near Fish Lake to take a look at a newly built section of the Pacific Crest Trail across the west lower side of Brown Mountain. This person claimed that she possessed ESP. The new trail was built across wide lava dikes over a seven mile stretch of trail. There were islands of dirt in between. The rocky stretches were paved with ground up red cinders. No good at all for foot or horse travel. The first lava flow we came to was 150 yards of loose, coarse ground, red rock trail. About halfway across, she raised her arms up as though to shield her face from something, and walked backwards aways. She said, "I can't go on. Let's turn back."

Well, I really couldn't see any reason to do that, nor could I see any reason to continue on. So we went back to the pickup and prepared to leave. I never questioned her, but I did notice that the moment she got into the rig, she made sure the window was rolled up, and her door locked, and she looked sort of frightened and had lost a little color.

Finally she told me what happened. Said the moment we walked out on the old lava flow she felt something. She claimed that there were many Indian spirits buried beneath that flow of lava rock, and the further we went, the worse it got. That's when she raised her arms in self defense. She could feel the suffering.

Then she quietly told me what must lay beneath the long, wide expanse of lava. Before Brown Mountain blew up, there was an Indian village there, set up on a broad, flat piece of ground, at the foot of the mountain. Molten lava spued from

the very top and flowed down all sides. An Indian tribe was caught unawares during the night and perished. This was her story and how she felt.

There is a huge crater on the top of Brown Mountain, maybe 75 feet across and round. It's about 40 feet deep at the center. I climbed to the top one day, and discovered where an emergency lookout was used from the northeast rim. Part of the old fire finder frame was there, and rusty tin cans were strewn around. Here lay another unsolved mystery beneath the Brown Mountain lava flow.

Rock grade near Seven Lakes Trail

North side of Bessie Rock, looking into Red Blanket count

CHAPTER TWELVE
SHOCK AT HONEYMOON CABIN

Since 1953, I have worked with many pack mules and horses. Over the years I gained a reputation of being a good mule skinner (packer). Consequently, I was the chosen one elected to make a good many safaris up and down the Cascade Divide here in Southern Oregon.

For several years the Forest Service was making a study of the area from Crater Lake National Park to Highway 140. Someone wanted to figure out if that country should be classed as a wilderness, primitive, or wild area. On these official trips, men from the higher echelons were, of course, included.

There were always at least ten of these guys who would ride, generally using the Pacific Crest Trail as the main artery to travel on. Usually it lasted for four days. On each trip, (I called it their annual leave trips) it always took five head of pack mules, each carrying close to 190 pounds the first day. From a trail head to the first camp was at least five miles or so for the pack string. The riders covered more ground because of side trips across country.

One such trip occurred in August of 1982. But, this time, I used just two mules, who were Big Red and Stella. The District Ranger at Butte Falls wanted to take several people into Honeymoon Cabin for an overnight, show-me trip. Some of these folks were to be what they called Back Country Guards. They would patrol the country, on foot, all summer long, from Crater Lake Boundary clear south to Highway 140. In the 1950's I used to do the same thing except I rode a horse and led a couple mules. To me it was just plain silly to do such work on foot. It was impossible to do a good job, let alone set an example.

I always worked with my pack string alone. There were only one or two people who knew about horses, and very little about mules. The only time I ever had any close calls, or unexpected runaways, was when some inexperienced person insisted on helping me.

I pulled out from Seven Lakes Trail head about 9 a.m. on a Thursday morning with Big Red and Stella. Each mule carried around 180 pounds. With a little luck I would be riding into Honeymoon Cabin around 1:00 p.m. My load consisted of sleeping bags, all little things, except mine, and lots of good food, including a dozen large fresh tomatoes.

We traveled a trail I had been on many times during the past 30 years. A lot of hair-raising events had taken place all along the 13 miles from Lodge Pole to Devil's Peak, saying nothing about all the wonderful things I saw and experienced. But, now it was only a six mile ride from my parked truck to Cliff Lake, and another five miles north to our destination.

Today was a dandy. The sun was hot, and the forest was alive with all sorts of activity, especially birds and squirrels. This drag could very well be one of my last. Just shy of 1:30 p.m., I was sitting on my horse looking at a nice little cabin called Honeymoon, named after a small stream that crossed the Pacific Crest Trail. It was constructed during the 1940's, to be used by men who measured snow depth on the Cascade Divide three times every winter. It took a day to get there, one day to measure the snow at a couple sites on day number two, and on the third day, they headed for home base. I had hauled supplies to the cabin when I worked out of Lodge Pole in the 1950's.

There was one man there, waiting for all those people to show up. I started to take the load off Stella, and the Back Country Guard started to unload Big Red. He did real good clear up until he

got within smelling distance of my mule. His long ears were pointed straight up and turned right toward the unfamiliar character.

The odd looking feller wore bell-bottom shorts. His hiking boots looked to be a couple sizes too big, but he made up for that by adding three pair of socks with funny-looking tops that went halfway up his hairy legs. His Forest Service shirt had short sleeves. It, too, was oversized. He wore a badge on one side and a name plate on the other, and one pocket was weighted down with several pencils and an oversized writing pad.

To cap things off he hadn't shaved lately or had a hair cut. His beard was long, dirty, and very much untrimmed, with hair to match. And his Forest Service hat, and small, round wire-rimmed glassed added to his funny looks. The otherwise nice felt hat was fashioned like the ones Park Rangers wear. It came down over that awful head of hair to just above his eyebrows. His eyes were a little too close together, separated with a thin, pointed nose. I can understand very well how come Big Red stayed clear of him.

After finishing unpacking Stella and turning her loose, I led Big Red over near the cabin and proceeded to pull the things off him. Our handy man was kept busy carting food into the shelter of the cabin. Soon, the sound of excited voices were coming from the Pacific Crest Trail. Twelve people came over a small rise, single file, toward the cabin. My two mules stayed clear and watched as the people approached. There wasn't a stranger in the country who could walk up to my mules.

After all the greetings and salutations were over with, me and my critters headed for the main trail. It wasn't proper to graze stock in Honeymoon Meadow anymore, too close to a small live stream that traveled the full length, crookeder than a snake. One bend almost touched the other for a couple hundred yards.

About two miles south I knew of a dandy acre or two full of Mountain Broom and Red Top grass. We would make camp and spend the night there. I always stayed close to my animals.

My plans were to walk back to the cabin and eat supper with the troops. Shouldn't be a problem if I secured the three critters real good so everyone could eat. There was a 20 foot stake rope anchored to the right foot of my horse, and 12 foot drag ropes on both mules. They could wander around and would never leave the horse.

In a half hour or so everyone greeted me and handed over an empty plate. Didn't take long for me to fill it up and start eating. Hadn't eaten anything since early morning. We were all sort of leaning back enjoying a big campfire, and we heard the hoof beat of running horses. In short order, Robert, my big yellow horse showed up through the trees. He had followed my tracks. Right behind him came Big Red and Stella.

My horse had been spooked by something, broke his hobble and came running. Course there was nothing stout enough to hold the mules back. I always carry extra quarter inch rope and some binding twine on any pack trip I've ever made. With a chunk of small rope, quickly a halter was fashioned for my horse's head. I climbed up on his smooth straight back and headed out for my camp. All my saddles, sleeping bags, and loose articles were in danger of being stolen, maybe already were.

In ten minutes my big horse came to a skidding halt. The two mules were close behind. It was pitch dark by now. All my gear was where I stashed it earlier. I groped around in my saddle bags and latched onto a flashlight. Carefully, the bright beam took in the whole area as I slowly turned. I saw the busted hobble at the end of Robert's stake rope. The tall grass had been smashed down all over the place. I found half of Big Red's drag rope nearby. I felt spooky and so did my animals.

I cleared out a safe place and started a warming fire. That seemed to help quiet things down some. But I could tell something had frightened the mules and my horse real bad, else they wouldn't have broke loose and came running to me. They were still jumpy and so was I.

About 10 p.m. I eased down into my sleeping bag and rested my head on a nice, soft pillow. Somehow, it would be nice to get this night behind us. Sleep took over immediately. I was dog tired. Around 2 o'clock the next morning something literally struck me awake. I was sleeping about half way on my left side. Something struck me a body-shaking jolt, high between my shoulders. At first I thought one of my mules snuck up and kicked me, was the way it felt. I didn't move for a moment, but I noticed the stock weren't jumping around.

I always keep my flashlight handy. The bright beam didn't reveal a thing except my critters were looking down the trail towards Devil's Peak. They were bunched up close, and were very nervous. I eased back and closed my eyes to listen. But, before too long, sleep took over again. Day break came on way too soon.

My shoulders ached some, but there didn't seem to be any permanent injury. The horse and mules were still nervous. I never did mention this little incident to anyone. They never would have believed me anyhow.

When everyone was saddled up I climbed up on my big horse and headed out. Big Red and Stella took off on a dead run ahead of me. They never slowed down until we got to Grass Lake in Seven Lakes Basin.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
MYSTERIOUS PLACES. HIDDEN SECRETS.

Some of the most beautiful country in the world is in the Cascade Mountains in Southern Oregon. Crater Lake, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is what was left of Mt. Mazama. It is way over a quarter of a mile deep, and the water is so pure and blue. Mt. Pitt (McLaughlin) comes right up to a point, 9495 feet high. It is the highest peak in this part of the area, and can be seen for great distances from any direction.

From the center of Crater Lake to the top of Mt. Pitt is more than 41 miles, air line, and right at 45 miles to Highway 140. The width of this area ranges from 20 to maybe 30 miles wide. Between these two well known landmarks are dozens of lakes such as those in Seven Lakes Basin, Sky Lakes, and Blue Canyon. Four Mile and Lake of the Woods are the two largest ones, on the south end. Within a short distance lies Fish Lake, Howard Prairie, and Hyatt Lakes.

The headwaters of the Great Rogue River gets its start from three different sources. Boundary Springs is a series of water springs, gushing from the ground at numerous places over a wide area. The site is at the north boundary of Crater Lake National Park. The water flows in a north to north-westerly direction, and comes to a channel that finally bends around to the west, south-westerly direction, toward Union Creek Resort. That is the North Fork of the Rogue River.

The Middle Fork starts in Seven Lakes Basin at Ranger Springs. It, too, flows north, then bends around to the west at the base of Kerby Hill. (Mudjekeewis Mountain)

The South Fork of the Rogue starts from the lakes in Blue Canyon and flows west. All three tributaries come together south of the town of Prospect, forming three deep canyons, or gorges.

Lost Creek Dam lies to the west of the start of the main river.

Within this great expanse of country are many peaks and ridges, such as Goose Nest, Goose Egg, Ruth, Ethel, and Maude. Northwest of those peaks is a mountain by itself called Lone Wolf. It was said that the man who named the peaks in that part of the wilderness figured there should be a wolf around somewhere since he named three nearby peaks after women he knew.

To name a few more: Tom & Jerry and Devil's Peak are 7000 feet plus in height. Just out of the protected area is Pelican Butte. It has an elevation of 8036 feet. There is a fire lookout there that is manned every summer. Also, Brown Mountain, near Fish Lake is 7311 feet high. Right on top is an old crater about 80 or 100 feet across, and maybe 50 feet deep.

The entire area is of volcanic origin. Hot spots and air holes are found in several places. One hot spot is located on the west side of Ethel Mountain. When there is a heavy snow pack in the high country, it can be seen from Hwy. 62, west of Prospect, on a bright day.

There is always a black streak that looks to be a half mile long and a couple hundred yards wide at the center, and comes to a point at each end. No matter how deep the snow gets, that spot always shows up dark in color. The snow does not cling to the cliff-like rocks.

Union Peak lies to the north a few miles, inside the Park boundary (Crater Lake). It is a little over 7700 feet high, very steep, and nothing but rock. I have seen it covered with a coat of snow and ice. So the place on Ethel Mountain has got to be hot enough to keep the ice and snow off.

In between all the peaks and ridges are vast areas of fairly open country. Also, there are numerous stringer meadows, some that have small streams of water that run through, and there are areas covered with grass with no water at all.

There is one area that covers part of four sections of land, south of Goose Egg, called the Oregon Desert. The first time I rode across this part of the country I had an exciting feeling. That was the summer of 1953.

That part of the country got its name because of the lack of water. The timber is mostly Lodgepole Pine with some Shasta and Mountain Hemlock around the outer edge. Besides that, there are vast areas of bare dirt. Young Lodgepole Pine grow in the protection of the older trees.

As I ride along, rock, cliff-like formations show up between the trees. Ever since I crossed the Oregon Desert the first time, I've wanted to return and explore around for a week or so. There is something out there that is unusual. That country has always held a great fascination for me.

There is another exciting place on the west slope of the Cascades. The Tom & Jerry Trail is one of the main lead-in access trails to the Pacific Crest. It is approximately six miles to McKie, and another three miles or so out to the southeast edge of the Oregon Desert.

The trail head is about a mile east of the old Bessie Creek shelter. (An uncle of mine built the three-sided structure by himself just after 1940.) It was the take off point to Bessie Rock Lookout years ago.

The surrounding country is steep and rugged. Timber was logged off to the Sky Lakes boundary. There are several large clearcuts adjacent to the area. From the trail head to where it crosses Bessie Creek is about one mile away. Just before the crossing there is a stock driveway that stays on the north side of the creek and turns gradually uphill, eventually entering the Lucky Camp Trail.

For many years the creek crossing was a ford, paved with large flat rock. As time went by the rock slowly sank into the mud, and a bridge was built. About a mile up the Tom & Jerry from the crossing there is an opening that parallels the

trail and Bessie Creek. The west end is maybe a hundred yards from trail to stream, and gets wider toward the east end.

The entire flat area is, no doubt, a hundred acres or more. The ground cover is huckleberry brush, Oregon Grape, and little stunted Hemlock, Lodgepole Pine, and Shasta Fir. There are quite a few old growth trees of the same species.

There is something special about the place. Every time I rode along, either up or down the Tom & Jerry, I looked it over until the long flat country disappeared. That is another place I wish to return and do some looking around and try to find out what is really there.

Along here is where my saddle horse and two mules really started acting up the year I went through a weird experience at McKie Shelter.

There are many other mysterious place in the Cascade Range. The cliffs of Mudjekeewis and Tom & Jerry Mountains drew my attention the first time I ever ventured into that country. The hot place on Ethel Mountain is surely a place to explore.

I've looked at that place from the Pacific Crest Trail with binoculars. There are many pinnacle-like rocks standing on end with cliffs along the upper side. It looks to me like there could be caves and small lava tubes within the dark area. It would be interesting to know how the Indian people felt about this particular place.

As I rode the trails, day and night, my thoughts rambled on about the place where snow never sticks. Could this be where Big Foot lives? I've also heard of the little people who live within the walls of Mt. Shasta. It's really funny how a feller's imagination runs away with itself during all those trips I made alone.

Also, I have heard a story or two about actual sightings of a flying saucer. One such incident was mentioned by a man who worked for me in 1959.

He was around 45 years old and had lived in Butte Falls, Oregon, most of his life. He was

honest and never had trouble getting along with everyone. In fact, he was a foreman of mine who managed a 10 to 12 man crew. Everyone liked him.

He said that one of his nephews and another man were hunting in a fairly rugged area on the west slopes of the Cascades. It was a nice day. They were maybe about five miles from the road where there was a parking area. The two men entered a shallow, heavily timbered draw, and walked around the lower part of a plateau-like ridge. As they entered an opening that was maybe an acre or so in size, there before them sat this strange-looking contraption.

There were no trees in the almost round place, just grass and some patches of miniature huckleberries. The two guys stepped back out of sight to collect their thoughts. Finally, they made sure their high-powered guns were ready to shoot. They crept around to where they could get a clear view of the object.

It was dark-colored and sat flat on the ground. There were no visible windows or door frames where the vehicle might open. There was no movement whatsoever, nor was the grass knocked down anywhere that they could see.

They looked it over for ten minutes or so but never ventured any closer. One man leveled his gun toward it and was going to fire a shot or two at the top of the round sphere that sat at least twenty feet high and was at least forty feet across.

As he took careful aim, the other man pushed the gun barrel upward. The gun never fired. With one last look they departed and quit hunting for the day. Later they went back for another look. The flying saucer was gone. But where it sat the grass was smashed flat. There were no dents in the ground.

I knew my foreman's nephew, and he, too, was an honest man.

CHAPTER 14
PACK MULES: MULE SKINNER'S WATCHDOGS.

Out there in the tall and uncut, I've had many a close call and narrow escape. When a man works with mules and horses, many times all night long, saying nothing about long, hard days, something is bound to happen. The odds are against a packer.

I've been kicked, bucked off, squeezed, and run over and stepped on. I've suffered a few broken ribs, many bruises, cuts, and scraped-off hide, and a few rope burns. But, during all those rough times, I wouldn't have traded those many years for anything anyone could mention. That sort of life grows on a man, gets in his blood.

A mule is the best back country companion a packer could ever have around, besides his dog. Of course his saddle horse is right there too.

You can call the long-eared critters herd bound if you like, but I've seen a lot of loners too. All the times I've been out in the wilderness with pack mules I would let them travel on their own, generally following along behind. Once in awhile one or two would travel ahead, but not very often. The only times I led the pack animals was when they carried something quite valuable, or at night. Pack horses always had to be led, I suppose there are exceptions.

It is impossible to run off from a mule. He will track you down like a hound dog. When my mules got scared, they came running to me for comfort. They were always treated with a lot of tender loving care.

Many times I would be on a long drag, checking on fires that were supposed to be out, and maybe delivering mail to a lookout or two. About mid-afternoon I would manage to arrive at a pond or lake along the way. Loads and saddles were removed so the critters could roll around and scratch their hides. While my dog and I ate lunch as my feet

were soaking in the cool clear water, my mules would be grazing nearby. Nothing escaped their vision, not even flight of a bird. If an animal or somebody approached, they reacted differently. I kept an eye on my watch-dog mules, and it always paid off. Nothing ever caught me off guard.

If a stranger came along and tried to catch one of my mules, they would soon realize it couldn't be done. They took care of me like I took care of them.

All those times I got a spooky, frightened feeling my mules reacted the same way. Man and beast alike possess all five senses, that are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and taste. But, for the life of me, my mules had sense number six, that can be chalked up to many kinds of reactions.

They will react in strange and mysterious ways for what appears to be no reason at all. And when mules show fright right after you have had a cold chill or two, better take notice. Something bad is afloat.

A few times I've been scared because of something I couldn't make out. Optical illusions are quite frightening. Believe me, when a feller can actually see something moving around, especially on a moonlit night, it causes many goose bumps, and I don't mean maybe. But when a couple mules and a saddle horse just stand there enjoying the night air, sort of causes a guy to feel a little silly.

One night I rode down the west slopes of the Cascade Divide, heading for Lodgepole Guard Station, my summer home. I had been in the saddle since 7 am that morning. Devil's Peak lookout needed a few things, including his mail, and the trail crew of about seven men had about run out of coffee and some other items, including some extra band aids and a jug of pancake syrup.

The seven men were just getting cleaned up for supper when I rode up. The foreman, an old mule

man, helped me unpack, unsaddle, and take care of the stock. Then we all sat around the big campfire, visited and ate a dandy meal.

The men wanted to put me up for the night, but there was another trip due the next day, so I had to ride. I loved it anyhow.

About a hundred yards away, I turned in the saddle and saw the men silhouetted against the campfire. Really looked good as the light reflected off the tents and big trees nearby.

I dropped off the bench-like flat country where Hemlock Lake is, and followed the switchbacks to lower country. By now, it was two hours after dark. The heavy high canopy overhead caused it to be mighty black. But, my saddle horse picked his way along the trail as though it was daylight.

For the first three miles the timber is tall with very few openings. But soon, the trail passes through an old burn. The brush is about horse high with several short fir trees that were forty plus years old. There was a full moon that night. When we entered the burn it was nearly like daylight. In fact, it was so beautiful, I pulled up to look and enjoy. Many a man would have paid good money to be there with me. It was indeed a wonderful experience.

I looked toward the heavens and saw millions of bright stars, some much larger than the others. One of them fell and made a long yellow streak in its wake. When it disappeared another one sailed across the sky in a different direction. In a few minutes there were five stars that streaked across the sky, every one in a different direction. Most amazing. (Later on I learned that it was the time showers of meteorites was happening.)

Finally, it was time to ride on. But first, my gaze spotted an object directly in my path, about a hundred yards down the trail. It had the appearance of a big, tall man, standing beside the trail holding an arm up on its right side. I watched it a moment and blamed if it didn't start

to move around. The arm moved back and forth, and the body seemed to be going up and down as though it was walking toward me. A few goose bumps came to life, and the adrenalin began to flow through my veins. What a spooky son of a gun thing this was.

At the peak of my excitement I blame near went back to the trail camp. But suddenly I realized that my horse and two mules were not the least bit excited. It just didn't add up.

Slowly my saddle horse walked toward the moving critter, the closer I got the more spooky it appeared. Boy did I feel silly as my horse pulled up beside a tall, Shasta Fir tree.

Several years ago there was a Christmas tree sale in this part of the country. The buyer was to remove trees and leave a high stump so there was a ring of limbs left near the top of the cut. Soon the limbs would turn up and become new tree tops. Later a forester would come along and remove them all except the largest, or dominant, one. It would turn into another beautiful Christmas tree in a much shorter time than planting a new tree.

The limb grew out aways from the high stump and was now about four feet tall. That was the spook that about got the best of me. Saved by my horse and mules. They never lie to a packer.

I found out one thing that a man can have a lot of fun with, and that is optical illusions after dark, especially on a moonlit night. An old prankster like myself can scare the living daylights out of a city slicker, and not hurt a soul.

In 1967, I transferred from the Ashland District to Union Creek at the north end of the Rogue River National Forest. Our three teenage daughters, Tricia, Janna and Leslie were in high school at the time.

In the evenings the three girls sat around the dining room table doing their homework and enjoying a big fireplace as the hot coals crackled and snapped. One evening I put my hat on and ventured

outside to enjoy a beautiful moonlit night. I stood at the edge of our back yard and listened to night time activity of birds and animals. The moon was beautiful.

As I looked the landscape over, there were three light-colored objects from fifty to one hundred feet away, toward the horse barn. I knew they were tree stumps with the bark removed. I fixed my gaze on the things for a moment. As I watched they seemed to start moving around. Each one moved in different directions, up, down, and sideways. It was really neat.

Quickly I dashed into the house and acted real excited. I told my girls to "come and look, there is something here you must see!" They put their pencils down and came running.

At the edge of the lawn the four of us stood. Tricia was at my left side, Janna near me on the right and Leslie stood close. I pointed out into the timber nearby and ask what they could see. Leslie said, "I see three white things." I told them to watch and not take their eyes off them. In less than half a minute, Janna took hold of my right arm with both her hands and said, "Oh, Daddy! They're moving!"

What fun it was to see how the three young women reacted. They learned, first hand, one of the mysteries of the tall and uncut. I had to put my arms around the three girls and lead them to those three frightening elements to prove they were only harmless tree stumps.

I have watched dark-colored objects as they seemed to move around, the same as a bear would if he was digging. The movements were exactly the same. The beam of a flashlight would reveal a large rounded boulder or maybe a tree stump.

There are so many mysterious things that occur, not only out there in the tall and uncut, but right here in the Rogue River Valley as well. If conditions are just right, such as moonlit nights or partly cloudy with a slight breeze, optical

illusions can certainly play tricks on you. But also there are many other situations where such illusions have no part in it, but rather people actually witness happenings that most of them do not wish to discuss. Having ridden horseback in the Cascades of Southern Oregon for more than forty years, I do know the stories, in most cases, are true. It's quite an exciting experience if a feller lives through it.

Grass Lake in Seven Lakes Basin

Four burner gas stove on Dillon Mule

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE DEVIL'S CRESCENT

During the early 1990's I read an article about the country that holds so much interest to me. Those years that me and my pack mules traveled three Great Divides was truly a wonderful experience. After I read the story it amazed me that I'm still here to tell about it. That country is called the Cascade Corridor, or the Devil's Crescent. The writer compared the area to the Bermuda Triangle.

The Corridor includes the northwest corner of California, the west halves of Oregon and Washington, and quite a chunk of the southwest edge of Canada. It extends out into the Pacific Ocean a few miles. It is mapped out in the shape of a long narrow crescent.

Within its boundaries are Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Pitt (McLaughlin), and Mt. Shasta. There are other places such as Crater Lake and surrounding landmarks, Rabbit Ears, Ruth, Ethel, and Maude Mtns. (Ethel Mtn. has a mile long, narrow dark streak on the west side that never collects snow, even though all other peaks are covered to below the timber line.) A host of mysteries have baffled Indian tribes, local residents and researchers studying the arcane happenings of past and present.

There are magnetic fields within the Corridor that act in bizarre and unexplainable ways. Ufos are sighted regularly. Big Foot roams, and people vanish. Phantom hitch hikers have been seen. Experienced pilots lose their bearings. (I have never seen Big Foot or a flying saucer.)

Ancient Indian legends tell of evil spirits that inhabited the area from the very dawn of creation. According to tribal lore, the restless spirits of the vanished hunters still prowl the

area, and stories of man and canoes plucked from the water are common among the Indians.

Perhaps strangest of all, quoted by the writer, are the sometimes terrifying psychic experiences reported by many who've ventured into certain parts of the Corridor. Indian medicine men regularly went to those sites to commune with the "Great Changer" and see visions.

Such sites are known as vortexes. It's a location where people and other living things and objects do not behave as they ordinarily would. Individuals who go into some of these natural vortexes, such as the one they tell me about near Mt. Shasta, claim they enter a different state of consciousness. It is said that there are also many such vortexes in the Cascade Corridor.

The most notorious is the so-called Oregon Vortex, located near Gold Hill, in Southern Oregon. It is about 165 feet in diameter and its strange powers continue to baffle scientists and investigators, because the supposedly immutable laws of physics simply do not apply within its boundaries.

Gravity pulls at odd angles, and the magnetic field twists and spins, making compasses useless. Birds refuse to fly over the area, visual perception and light are distorted, and men's minds run amok.

Some people believe that some areas of the Corridor are like an inter-dimensional window, and when people inadvertently pass through, they can mysteriously die, vanish or end up somewhere else in the Corridor, sometimes far from where they were. Others think that UFOS are responsible. UFO sightings are commonplace in the Corridor. In fact the term flying saucer originated with a 1947 eyewitness report of a UFO seen in the Corridor by a pilot. He described nine UFOS as looking like flying saucers.

I have heard stories of many other incidents and sightings in the tall and uncut country of the

southern end of the Cascade Range. There is no doubt in my mind but what they are all true.

I look forward to my next trip into the high country, to sit near a warm campfire and think about these weird happenings and tense moments. And I must still visit that rugged out-cropping of bedrock at the south end of Tom and Jerry Trail. I feel that something strange goes on there. Are there any of you readers willing to come along?

Gordon Jesse Walker and Patches, Union Creek Corral

EPILOG

I have lived here in the Rogue River Valley nearly all my life (72 years). But the sad part of the whole thing is, I never got started to travel in the wilderness country until 1953.

I spent 16 years riding forest trails as weather permitted. I lived through many a thrilling adventure and hair-raising event. My mules, horses, and dog were suffering the same feelings of fright as I did.

If anyone who ventures into the Cascade Corridor expecting some thrilling incident to occur, don't be disappointed. You may have to make several trips before something happens. And it will crop up when least expected.

My only regret is I wish I had lived to be 100 years old and died 40 years ago. Then maybe I could have gotten into all this excitement sooner.

GJW

Pack String to Bessie Rock; Cargo: Gas cook Stove, heater, fuel, and food; Last pack trip to Bessie Rock

Middle Lake in Seven Lakes Basin; Devil's Peak, background